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THE CZAR'S SPY; or, The Nihilist League.

BY COL. THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY,

CHAMPION-AT-ARMS OF THE TWO AMERICAS.

AUTHOR OF "IRON WRIST, THE SWORDMASTER," "THE DEMON DUELIST," ETC., ETC.



"COWARD!" UNDER THE INSULT HE TURNED DEADLY PALE, AND THE GIRL SEIZED HIM BY THE ARM AND FORCED HIM BACK SEVERAL STEPS

The Czar's Spy;

OR,
THE NIHILIST LEAGUE.

A Sequel to "Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster."

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROCLAMATION.

THE city of St. Petersburg was all ablaze with lights; the Neva was covered with boats, darting to and fro, carrying long strings of colored paper lanterns; the bands were playing in a dozen different places, answering each other from the various quarters of the city; and the streets were full of people, talking, laughing and singing, while every man was embracing his neighbor.

For it was past midnight of Easter Even, and Easter Day festival had begun already.

Easter is the great day of all days in Russia after Christmas, and hardly second even to that in the affections of the simple and homely common people.

On Easter Day every one kisses his friends and neighbors of all degrees; the colonel kisses his officers; the captain his soldiers, the master his servants, one and all with the salutation:

"Christ is risen to-day!"

But in general this ceremony does not begin till sunrise. Why then was it that on this night of Easter Even it began as soon as the bells had tolled midnight?

The reason was found in the will of one man. In Russia one man has a great deal of power, if he be in a certain position.

For instance, he may be Governor of a province, far from St. Petersburg. In that case he does about as he pleases for eleven months in the year. On the twelfth comes the Government inspector, and the Governor has to get ready all the cash he can raise to bribe the inspector to make a favorable report to the Czar. After that comes another year of power.

Or he may be a general, a colonel, a captain. In either case, his power is absolute over all under his orders, till the central authority chooses to interfere.

And in St. Petersburg there is one man who does just as he pleases all the year round, while everybody obeys him.

That man is the Czar.

And the Czar had given orders that the Easter Festival should begin as soon as the bells tolled midnight on Easter Even.

For his majesty had determined that all Russia should be happy, whether the people wanted it or not and on that Easter Even had proclaimed the total EMANCIPATION OF THE SERFS.

It sounded well.

The Russians were all to clap their hands, dance and sing for joy, and every one was to be happy. There were to be no more serfs in Russia.

And to do them justice, most of them were very glad of the proclamation.

But there was a large section of the nobles and a part of the older peasants not so well satisfied.

One wanted his serfs back as in the old times; the other was afraid that he would starve in a state of liberty.

So that, in spite of the bands and the lanterns and the shouts, there was, even in St. Petersburg, a considerable undercurrent of grumbling going on, which was to break out a few years later in the throes of Nihilism.

In the midst of all these rejoicings a steamer came up the Neva from Cronstadt, a small concern used to transfer baggage from the English and Hamburg packet, and a trim-built, slim-waisted gentleman with a military air, wearing a huge waxed mustache and imperial of light sandy gray, disembarked with a small bag in his hand and a long slender case under one arm, and inquired of a hotel "commissioner" in broken Russian:

"Where shall I find a good hotel and a man who will take from me a note to the commander of the Circassians of the Guard, Tekli Aga?"

"The best of all hotels in the whole world is the Hotel du Nord, which I have the honor to represent," was the polite reply, with much rubbing of hands. "If your nobility wishes, I myself will take the note to Tekli Aga."

So the trim, military-looking gentleman hands his bag to the commissioner; shows him a couple of huge trunks; steps into a drosky and is soon after snug in the Hotel du Nord, with the big trunks beside him.

Then as the commissioner waits for his letter, expectant of a fee, the trim gentleman remarks:

"The city seems a good deal changed since I was here before."

"Yes, most high-born one," ventures the Russian dubiously. "That was—?"

"Thirty-five years ago," returned the stranger thoughtfully.

The other stared. "Thirty-five years! why, most high-born one, that must have been in the days of the old white Czar."

Alexander the first had always held this title in Russia.

The stranger shook his head.

"No; he was just dead. Nicolas was the Czar in those days. And I have not seen Russia since. Tell me, hast thou heard ever of one Count Strogonoff, who was minister of police in those days?"

"Count Strogonoff is one of our richest nobles, most high-born one, but he is only a young man and not in office."

The stranger smiled.

"Ah, then the old one must be dead. Yes, all are dead, now, but Tekli Aga and myself."

He seemed to be struck by some memory that made him mournful, for he sat there musing till the porter coughed in a gentle manner to recall him to his senses.

Then he asked:

"Do the people still remember the Grand Duke Constantine?"

"The Grand Duke Constantine. Surely most high-born one. He is now Governor of the Caucasus Provinces."

"No, no. You mean the young man; one of the Czar Nicolas's sons. I mean the old one—him they called the Mad Duke."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders.

"Most high-born one; it is all a poor man like me can do to know people who are alive. The Mad Duke died in Poland a long time ago."

"Yes, I know that. But do not the people remember him?"

"Yes; most high-born one. I have heard my father say that he was a very cruel man, who was hated and feared by all."

The stranger started slightly and frowned.

"They don't know anything about it. He was a gentleman when I knew him. But come, tell me, how old a man is Tekli Aga? Do you know him?"

"Yes, most high-born one. He has been in the Circassians of the Guard since before I was born, so I'm told."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-seven years, next St. Vassili's Day, most high-born one."

"St. Vassili is your name saint then?"

"Yes, your nobility. I am Vassili Petrovitch, at your nobility's service."

"Well, Vassili, you're wrong. Tekli Aga and I were in the service of the Grand Duke Constantine thirty-six years ago, and Tekli did not join the Czar's Guards till long after that. How does he look now?"

"A slim, straight old man, most high-born one, with a long beard like a snow-drift."

The stranger laughed.

"Aha! old Tekli does not wear like me, then. I'm hardly gray yet, though I'm fifty-four this year. But come, Vassili, you said you could take a note from me to him. Here is my card. Take it to the gentleman, and tell him I am here and wish to see him. That's all."

He threw the obsequious porter an English half-sovereign, handed him a card, and then turned to his trunks and began to unpack them while the Russian left the room.

As the porter shuffled along he stopped under the gas to read the card, which ran:

"COLONEL COUNT OLAF SVENSON
late Instructor-at-Arms,
Spanish Army."

Vassili Petrovitch scratched his head and muttered:

"Who the deuce is this, and how does he know Tekli Aga?"

He took the card off through the streets, late as it was, for all the population was abroad, and made his way to the arsenal, where the gates were wide open, the sentries removed and all the soldiers more or less drunk.

The Czar had ordered the people to enjoy themselves in honor of the emancipation of the serfs; and a Russian's idea of true and hearty enjoyment consists in three things. First, he wants plenty of vodka, or rye whisky; second, enough money to buy all he can drink; third, a place to lie down in peace when he is dead drunk.

Vassili, being a hotel porter, had to keep sober while on duty; but he cast many a longing eye on the sleepers he encountered at every doorway.

He wished he had time to get as drunk as they were.

He went into the arsenal and reached the quarters of the Circassians, where he found all quiet and orderly.

The stately warriors of the Caucasus were all awake, fully armed, and smoking their pipes in the serene dignity of Mahometans.

Not one of them had drunk a drop of vodka, and a look of grave disgust was on all their faces as they looked at their Russian comrades at their drunken orgies all around them.

Tekli Aga was a well-known figure in the capital, a slim-built, broad-shouldered man, with a grave, handsome face, snow-white beard, and the figure of an athlete.

Vassili Petrovitch presented him the card, and told him that the gentleman was at the hotel and wished to see him.

The Moslem took the card gravely—upside down—turned it over, and then remarked:

"It is good. But who is the gentleman?"

"His name is on the card, most high-born."

"Read it for me, then."

Vassili obeyed.

The Circassian listened to the name and shook his head.

"I do not know the man."

"He knows your nobility, however, and says that you were both once in the service of the late Grand Duke Constantine."

Tekli Aga started and seemed to reflect.

"The Grand Duke Constantine?" he muttered.

"Who can it be?"

"He says, most high-born, that he has not been in Russia for thirty-five years."

Tekli Aga laid aside his pipe.

"Lead on," he said. "I will follow you."

The porter took him to the hotel and led him up to the stranger's room, where these two men stood staring at each other as if mutually astonished.

At last the stranger spoke:

"I should never have known you, Tekli."

The Circassian bowed gravely.

"I do not know you, even now," he said.

The stranger smiled, put his hand in his vest pocket, and drew therefrom a ring, set with several large brilliants.

"Do you know that?" he asked, quietly.

Instantly Tekli Aga's whole manner changed.

His face lighted up, and he rushed to embrace the other, crying:

"It is my brother, Olaf, King of the Sword! Oh, welcome a thousand times!"

Then they stood there, hugging each other like children—these two tough veterans—till Olaf said at last:

"Enough, my brother! I have been round the world since we parted, and have come back to seek my fortune again. Do they still fence in St. Petersburg?"

Tekli Aga shook his head.

"These new rifles and revolvers have spoiled all the swordsmen, brother; but there will never fail to be work for a man like you. In fact, I have a place for you at once, if you will have it."

"And what is that?"

"I will tell you at the palace, if you will come with me, Olaf."

"That is the place for me. Ah, Tekli, do you remember those old days when we beat Strogonoff?"

"We have worse than Strogonoff to beat now," replied Tekli Aga gravely.

"Who is it?"

"A horde of men who work in secret. You shall know soon."

Tekli took him by the arm and hurried him off to the Winter Palace, where the sentries saluted the Circassian chief as he passed, but halted him finally at the foot of the stairs leading to the Czar's private cabinet.

"You can go up yourself," explained the officer on duty; "but no stranger can pass till the Czar gives the order."

Tekli shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, he shall give it in a minute at the outside. Wait for me, Olaf."

CHAPTER II.

THE CZAR'S CABINET.

WITHIN the Winter Palace, in the most retired part, at the end of a suite of apartments, each one of which was furnished with a quota of officers on duty, was the private cabinet of the Czar Alexander II.

The Czar himself, a large, fair-haired man, with an appearance more German than Russian, was listening to the words of two gentlemen in the rich diplomatic uniforms of cabinet ministers, who were explaining to him alternately something to which he listened with an inscrutable face.

"It is the consequence of the old Russian feeling among the nobility of Moscow," said Baron Grodnowitz obstinately. "I had the extreme honor to predict to your majesty that they would endeavor to stir up all the trouble they could as soon as the act of emancipation was signed."

"On the contrary," protested Prince Zolinski with earnestness, "I am certain that it will be found that one of the radical agents of the Communists has done this, by infecting the lower orders and corrupting the soldiery."

"The soldiery have no access to the throne room without their officers, and all the officers are nobles," retorted the baron, with asperity.

"You say that because you are envious," was the tart reply.

Then the Czar raised his hand, and in a moment the wrangling ministers were as silent as mice.

"It seems," observed the autocrat in his gentle voice—so different from the gruff, drill-sergeant tones of his father, the terrible Nicolas; "that you gentlemen are undecided as to the origin of this plot."

Both ministers were silent.

"Here has there happened a thing without

precedent in history," pursued Alexander; "in broad daylight and under the very nose of my guards, the great Orloff diamond and the black pearl of Kazan are stolen out of the crown of Russia; and you, baron, my minister of secret police, and you, prince, my governor of the palace, can give me no clew as to the perpetrators."

They both looked much ashamed, but could think of nothing better than to dart spiteful glances at each other.

The Czar sighed:

"I wish I had, in my service a single man of the type my father had in the old days. I have heard him tell such stories! But now, it seems, I have all the fools on my side, while the men of brains are all *against* me."

As he spoke came a gentle and very respectful tap at the door, and the emperor wheeled round in his chair.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened and the glittering figure of Tekli Aga in his mail shirt and plumed helmet, stood waiting.

The Czar nodded and smiled.

"Ah, Tekli Aga, come in. I was just telling these gentlemen the kind of men my father had to serve him. You are one of them. If you were only a Russian, you would have ferreted out this thing for me long ago. Well, what do you want?"

"Please your majesty, I have found the man who will track the robbers for us and find the jewels," answered Tekli Aga.

"The man; what man?"

"One of the old kind of men that the great Czar Nicolas had to serve him."

"Indeed! who is he?"

"Count Olaf Svenson, majesty."

"Svenson?" repeated Alexander. "I do not remember any such."

"He was known as Olaf, the swordmaster, thirty-five years ago, and he was the man who foiled Strogonoff—then chief of secret police—and enabled the Grand Duke Constantine to marry the Princess Natalie Dembinski."

"Natalie Dembsinki," repeated the Czar in a musing tone. "I remember her now; a wrinkled old woman, who died at Warsaw. They said she was very beautiful in her youth, Tekli."

"She was, majesty."

"What! Did you know her?"

"Olaf and I carried her off."

"Olaf, Olaf! Who was he? I've heard the name somewhere."

"He was the king of all swordsmen, sire; and he beat me once with the saber. I have the mark here."

He showed the Czar a deep scar in one ear, where a piece had been cut off, and the wound had puckered up the skin in healing.

The Czar looked surprised.

"Did this Olaf do that?"

"He did, sire, and I gave up to him the ring I won myself from Kouli Khan the Tartar, and which only belongs to the king of all the swordsmen."

"And where did he go that he left my father's service?" asked the Czar.

"To America, sire."

"America! why not stay here?"

"Because it was not safe, sire."

"What do you mean?"

"This Olaf was in the service of the Grand Duke Constantine."

"Well?"

"And the Czar did not wish the Grand Duke to marry a Pole."

"Well, what then?"

"And Olaf, to compel his majesty to give his consent, held a pistol to the head of the Czar of all the Russias."

Alexander looked thunderstruck.

"Drew a pistol on my father?"

"Yes, sire, just as the Czar had ordered the arrest of the Grand Duke Constantine."

The emperor looked very much interested.

"Tell me all about this. I never heard it before."

Tekli bowed.

"Your majesty, the man himself after roaming all over the world, has come to St. Petersburg to seek his fortune. If it please you to see him, he can tell you in better words than I."

The Czar nodded.

"I am curious to see this man who once bearded my father and made him do the will of another. Bring him up."

Tekli Aga bowed and vanished.

The Czar turned to his ministers.

"Gentlemen, I am ready to accept your resignations, if you cannot find who stole those jewels before Monday morning."

Then he inclined his head frigidly, and the crestfallen ministers left the room.

Presently Tekli Aga came back, and with him a trim, soldierly man, whose waxed mustache and imperial made him look just like Louis Napoleon, while his thin figure and long serious face exactly resembled those of Don Quixote, save that he was a decided blonde in complexion.

The Czar looked at this gentleman with much interest, as Olaf saluted in a courtly style that told of a more southern school of breeding.

Then the emperor said:

"And is it possible you once drew a pistol on the Czar, my father, and yet lived to tell of it?"

Count Olaf spread out his hands in a deprecating way.

"Pardon, your majesty, but that was thirty-five years ago and under some peculiar circumstances not likely to ever occur again."

"What were they?"

"The gracious Czar and his brother had quarreled about a lady; the troops had all risen in mutiny, and the Grand Duke Constantine, in whose employ I was, had been arrested."

"Indeed? and what then?"

"The Czar Nicolas had ordered his brother to be strangled, and it was life against life. The room was full of police, and I had no other way to save my own master but to threaten the Czar's life. I never betray my employer, and so I risked my life and won the game."

"Won the game?"

"Yes, sire. It was only a game of love. The Grand Duke wished to give up the succession to the crown in order to marry the woman he loved."

The words had a visible effect on the Czar. He rose to his feet, trembling in a singular way, and asked:

"And did he owe his love and happiness to your devotion?"

Olaf bowed gravely:

"His highness was graciously pleased to say as much, sire."

The Czar seemed to be stifled with some secret emotion. He took one or two turns up and down the room and then stopped before Olaf.

"Sir," he said, in a rather sad way, "I wish, when I was a young man, I had had such a follower as you. I might not be Czar to-day; but I might be better; a happy husband and father."

He went and sat down at the table and rested his face on his hands.

In truth Alexander, Emperor of all the Russias, had in his youth devotedly loved a subject, the Princess Dolgoroucki, whom his harsh father had compelled him to abandon to marry a German princess, whom he hated.

The young prince, while he had been only the Czarewitch, had been hectored and bullied by the lordly Nicolas till his character had been crushed in a way from which it never after recovered.

A shade of profound melancholy rested on Alexander II as Czar, which never left him till his unhappy ending, many years after; and though as Czar, he had established illicit connections with the woman he loved, the thought of her disgrace and his own weakness was never absent from his mind.

Years afterward, when the Czarina died, he hastened to repair the injustice as far as he could, by marrying the woman he loved; but at the moment when Olaf saw him he was thinking to himself how much happier he might have been had he possessed the fiery courage and determination of his uncle Constantine.

Presently he looked up.

"You are a man among millions," he said. "Will you serve me as well as you did my uncle?"

Olaf bowed low.

"If your majesty will trust me, I will do my best."

The Czar smiled.

"I need now a man of courage and of knowledge of the world. Tell me, have you seen much of the world?"

Olaf smiled in answer.

"I have visited the four quarters of the globe, sire; have fought duels with all the weapons that ever were invented; have gambled against all the cheats of all the nations, and never found the scrape out of which I could not extricate myself."

"You are the man I need for a secret agent. I have a task to set you at once. Will you try it?"

"I will, sire."

"Yesterday morning, in broad daylight, the two most famous jewels of my crown were stolen from the treasury. I want you to find the thieves and recover the jewels. Can you do it?"

Olaf looked doubtful.

"I can try, sire. If I find the thieves, and if the jewels are still in Russia I will have them, if I have to cut men open to get them out. Your majesty knows they may swallow them."

"Very well. What do you want?"

"An order from your majesty directing all persons to obey me on my duty; permission to assume any character I please from an officer of your guards to a foreign traveler; and finally money for all expenses."

"And do you not need pay for your services besides?"

"Not till they are rendered, sire. Then I leave all to your majesty."

"You shall have all you desire. Here is an order on my treasurer for an unlimited credit, and a commission that will pass you anywhere in my dominions. The jewels were stolen from

the treasury, and Count Boris will give you the full particulars. You have unlimited powers, if you will only bring back the jewels."

Olaf bowed low as he backed out.

"Your majesty shall hear of or from me in three days," he said.

Then he and Tekli Aga left the cabinet and proceeded straight to the office of Count Boris.

Every one in the Winter Palace was up that night, by the Czar's orders.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOLEN JEWELS.

COUNT BORIS was a little, furtive man, with a wandering eye and a habit of rubbing his hands when he spoke.

He received Olaf and Tekli Aga with great courtesy as soon as he had read the order of the Czar, and was at once subjected to a searching cross-examination by the keen swordmaster, who elicited the following story:

On certain days in the week the public were allowed the run of part of the Winter Palace, including the throne room, and all except the Czar's private apartments; while the crown jewels were shown to those who chose to pay a fee to the sergeant of the guards, under the eyes of a sentry whose piece was loaded.

On the previous day there had been a stream of visitors, but it was not till the closing of the doors, when it became the duty of the officer of the day to inspect the crown, that it was found that two famous jewels, the Orloff diamond and the Black Pearl of Kazan, had been abstracted.

Of course the sentry was clapped in irons the very first thing, threatened with the sticks, questioned, cross-questioned; but nothing could be got out of him.

Not a soul had been allowed inside the brass railing, four feet from the crown, and he was unable to account for the loss. Then they caught the sergeant of the guard but he was equally non-committal.

He had seen no one inside the railing, and he laid it all to witchcraft.

Of course he had lost his stripes at once and was clapped into irons along with the sentry. The next thing was to arrest every person known to have visited the crown room.

This was easy enough, because each visitor had to record his name in a book as he paid his fee, and Baron Grodnowitz had sent out his men to scoop them in.

They had found all but three men and one woman, and these seemed to have given in false addresses, for they were not at the houses indicated on the book.

"And have you found nothing about them?" asked Olaf keenly.

The count's eyes wandered away.

"Nothing. It is the most mysterious thing I ever heard of."

"Where is the office of Baron Grodnowitz?" asked Olaf, next.

"In the east wing of the palace. He can tell you more than I," answered Boris with an air of relief. "In truth I am tired of talking about the affair."

Olaf nodded.

"I don't wonder. If I were you I should feel more worried than you, as if it were my fault."

Boris started and flushed.

"My fault! What do you mean?"

"Oh nothing, only a treasurer is always the responsible party if treasure is stolen."

"I assure you, Count Svenson, I have no more idea of who did this than you."

"I do not doubt it, Count Boris. I shall need five hundred roubles to start with."

"Certainly, sir, at once."

The count seemed to be nervous and very uneasy as he counted out the money, and as they went away Tekli Aga said:

"He knows more about this than he tells us."

Olaf shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps not. He is frightened; that is all. I cannot see the tracks yet. Let us go to this Baron Grodnowitz."

They proceeded to the office of the chief of secret police, whom they found nodding in his chair, for it was getting near morning. When he was roused and had seen Olaf's order he observed bitterly:

"So you are the man come to teach me how to do my business. Very well, sir, we will see if your Danish wit is any better than my plain Russian ways."

Olaf laid his hand soothingly on his arm.

"My dear baron, it is only a whim of his majesty; and besides, you do not know who I am. Did you ever hear how I beat all the police of Russia in the days when Count Strogonoff had your department? Believe me, my dear sir, I have some little experience in this thing. Tell me now, have you the names of the missing visitors?"

The baron turned sulkily to a book.

"Yes; here they are inscribed."

"Let me see them; or, you can read them."

Baron Grodnowitz read out:

"Fedor Vassilovitch, Martin Petrovitch, Sofia Ivanowna, Gavril Somoff."

Olaf listened keenly.

"Then only one has a surname."

The baron looked surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am not a fool if I am a foreigner. All the names but Gavril Somoff are merely Christian names. Have you no other traces?"

In fact the terminations "vitch" and "owna" in Russian merely mean "son of" and "daughter of" such an one, and the prefix is merely a Christian name.

The baron smiled a little sarcastically.

"If you were a Russian you would know that peasants have no surnames, and that of all these people only Gavril Somoff is noble."

Olaf smiled back in the same way.

"I am aware of that. I asked you if you had no other traces. That was all."

"What more would you have?"

"I mean have you description of these people, their looks and general appearance?"

"Of course not. How could we?"

The baron was lofty in his scorn.

"You think you are very keen. How would you go to work to find out the description of four people among fifty-three?"

"Ah, there were fifty-three, then?"

"Yes; that is the number in the book for yesterday."

"And you have arrested forty-nine. Where are they all?"

"In the prison of detention."

"Where is the door-keeper that let them in, baron?"

"He is at his post."

"Send for him at once."

The baron stared.

"Sir, I am not used to being ordered—"

"Do you see that order?" growled the Dane, his whole countenance changing to a look of such ferocity that the baron involuntarily quailed. "It directs all people—mark you, baron—all people to obey my orders on duty. Send for the man at once."

The baron rung his bell meekly.

Presently the door-keeper came in, a short, stout, foxy-looking man. Olaf commenced at once.

"You are the door-keeper to the crown room?"

"Yes; most high-born one."

"Did you let in any gentlemen yesterday?"

"Yes; most high-born one. There was one, a handsome gentleman in a sea-otter pelisse, with his servant. The rest were all *mujiks*."

Olaf glanced at the chief of police, who bit his lip.

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"He was tall and fair, with a red scar on his forehead, down over the right eyebrow. He looked like a German."

"And his servant?"

"Just a common peasant, most high-born one, with a big beard and a squint in one eye."

"Which eye?"

"The left, your nobility."

Olaf nodded.

"Any women passed in?"

"Plenty, your nobility. The gentleman was following one of them."

"Indeed. How do you know?"

"Oh, most high-born one, I've nothing to do but sit at the door and watch, and I see a good deal. Gentlemen will follow girls, you know."

"This girl. Did he speak to her?"

"No, your nobility; but he made signals to her, and she answered. They spoke to each other outside the door afterward."

"And what was the girl like?"

"She was a black Gipsy, most high-born one."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know them all, most high-born one. They may dress as they please, but I know a Gipsy when I see one. She was a black Gipsy, from the Upraine, dressed up like a shop girl of the city."

"How was she dressed?"

"In a French cap and red petticoat, with all sorts of French things about her. I do not know much about a woman's dress, most high-born one."

"Did you hear the gentleman speak to his servant at all?"

"Yes, your nobility. He called him Fedor, and told him to hurry out to the drosky."

"That will do. You can go."

Olaf turned to Grodnowitz.

"You see it is not necessary to threaten sticks to any one to find out a good deal. Does any one outside know of the theft of the jewels?"

"No one but the guard and ourselves."

"Then now let us go see the prisoners. Do they know why they are arrested?"

"Not a word."

"So much the better. Come."

The baron took him out to the very end of the palace, just as day dawned, crossed a courtyard, and ushered him into a long room in a dismal building, where a number of people were fast asleep on a stone floor.

Olaf went up and down, looking at the sleepers, who were mostly workmen and shop-keepers, each in his class costume.

"They know nothing of it," he said in a low tone. "Look. Every one of them is fast asleep, and not one dreams. If there were a guilty man among them, he would be tossing in his sleep. Let us go."

He went back to the palace and continued in his sharp way:

"Send out the description of the man, his servant, and the girl. Have them all three arrested and brought in."

The baron began to see that the Dane knew his business, and he called up his telegraph man at once, and soon had the description clicking away to all parts of the city, while Olaf sat in a brown study, thinking over plans to himself.

Presently he roused up and said to Tekli Aga, who sat silent and patient by his side:

"Come, let us go to sleep. Baron, let me have a corner of your sleeping room, and have me waked as soon as a report comes in."

The baron was infinitely disgusted at the quiet air of authority assumed by this total stranger; but he could do no less than obey, and within ten minutes Olaf and the Circassian were sound asleep.

When Tekli Aga spoke of going back to the barracks, Olaf shook his head.

"No; I shall want you. The Czar's paper covers everybody, and I order you to stay with me."

Tekli Aga was not sorry to obey.

How long they had slept they knew not; but it was broad day when the police officer shook Olaf's shoulder.

"Your nobility will oblige the baron by coming to see him. There is a report."

Olaf jumped up in a moment, broad awake, and hurried out to meet Grodnowitz, who read out to him in sleepy tones a dispatch. The message ran:

"Prince Gavril Nesseldorf passed out on the road to his estates last night. He had with him a Gipsy girl. He is the only man who answers the description."

"And where are this gentleman's estates?" was Olaf's immediate query.

"He has immense quantities of land in the vicinity of Ekaternieburg, with gold mines in the Ural mountains. He is the richest prince we have, after Strogonoff."

"Then I shall need three thousand more rubles to catch him, baron. Let me have them, and charge it to Count Boris. Also I want a telega and post-horses at once, unless there is a railway that goes toward the prince's estates."

"There is none. You must post. But you will have to be careful. This prince cannot have stolen the jewels himself, and he is a hot-headed, fiery fellow, who might shoot you at once."

Olaf grinned rather scornfully.

"Might he? Well, let us see if he does. That is my business, you know, fighting."

He went out with the baron, and they ordered out a telega or hooded post-chaise, hung on long pine poles for springs.

Then Olaf ordered himself the dress of a St. Petersburg shop-keeper—a long furred coat and a tall cap of fur, inside of which he loaded himself with arms of all sorts, sending to the hotel for his huge chests, which turned out to be full of weapons.

Then at last, in the middle of the day accompanied by Tekli Aga who had taken on him the appearance of a peaceful Persian merchant from Astrachan the redoubtable swordmaster set forth on his journey in quest of the stolen jewels from the crown of Russia.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ROAD.

OUT in the midst of forests; low and scrubby it is true in the matter of trees, but covering the whole face of the country.

Not a hill to be seen any more than there is round Chicago. A dead flat to all seeming, though it really slopes gently away to the southeast toward the Caspian sea.

The spring is just opening and the face of the country is one vast waste of mire, through which toils, creaking and groaning, a carriage with an open front and a big hood behind.

The body of the vehicle would excite no comment in the Central Park, but the wheels are heavy enough for a four-horse truck, and they are placed at either end of two springy pine poles, about twenty feet long.

Such are the simple springs used in Russian travel. If they break down it is only jumping out of the telega and cutting two more poles in the wood. If they were more elaborate they would break just the same, and then be unmendable.

In the carriage, fast asleep, are two men, one of them a Persian merchant with a tall fur cap and a white beard, the other a Russian in a long furred gown with a square cap.

On the box sits a stout, determined-looking man, whom any one can tell to be a Cossack, though his dress is peaceful now. He glances back at the men in the carriage and grumbles to himself:

"There it is, sleep, sleep, sleep all the time, when a person wants to have a little chat to pass away the time, and no sooner does the road get bad than they are both like raging tigers, shouting at a person. I don't see why they should behave so; for, after all, they're no better than I."

Bump! went the telega into a mud-hole, and the Cossack grinned maliciously.

"That will wake them up," he muttered.

And inasmuch as the telega stood still, the smoking horses resting for a while, the two men in the carriage started up in a moment, broad awake, and began to curse the stolid driver volubly.

"Bakloushin, pig, brute, fool, what are you about? Do you expect ever to get to Provolskoi this way? Why don't you whip up?"

Bakloushin looked over his shoulder with all the provoking coolness of a Russian of the lower orders who is in a difficulty which chiefly concerns his employers.

"Patience, little fathers, patience. If we kill the horses, we shall never get there."

This being true, the travelers were obliged to restrain themselves till it suited Bakloushin to whip up, when the telega finally emerged from the mud-hole and toiled on with a wonderful amount of creaking.

"And are you going much further than Provolskoi, little father?" asked Bakloushin, in his most wheedling tones, as they jolted along.

It was noticeable that the driver used the familiar "batushka" or "little father" in place of the ceremonious "most high-born," which the Russian employs to all nobles.

Such is the influence of dress.

Olaf Svenson looked at him with a frown.

"Suppose you drive more and talk less," he said, sternly. "We shall be better pleased."

Bakloushin grinned amicably.

"No offense, little father. God and St. Vasil are over us all, and they let us ask all we want to ask."

Olaf turned away his head and pretended to go to sleep. He could not put on his usual fierce airs without betraying his real character, and it was his object to travel as much in a peaceful guise as possible.

"Going to the fair at Novogorod, I suppose?" the incorrigible Bakloushin went on. "The Persian gentleman wants to buy furs, I suppose?"

The Persian gentleman snored in the most ostentatious manner.

Bakloushin gave his horses a vicious lash as the road grew a little better, and drove on, growling to himself:

"Such pigs I never saw. No sociability."

They traveled on all day through the mire, and at last arrived at the town of Provolskoi, where was a bridge of boats over the Volga river.

Here also they found hotels, at one of which they put up for the night, an arrangement which greatly pleased Bakloushin.

The Cossack was in fact a member of the police and an ex-soldier, and he was used to being confided in as to the object of any journey on which he was sent, but this time he found himself in a quandary.

He had been summoned with his telega to obey the orders of the chief of secret police and had been given these two strangers, whom he had never seen before, and one of whom spoke the very worst Russian he had ever heard, while the other grunted and said nothing.

Bakloushin could not tell who they were nor what they wanted.

They did not even tell him where they were going, except as from one station to the next. They had come from Kostroma last, and had spent nearly a day in each place on the road, asking questions of which the puzzled driver could not see the use.

When they reached Provolskoi, they sent for the landlord of the inn and began to question him in the same curious way, asking who had passed through for several days, and finally coming down to the inquiry:

"Do you know Prince Gavril Nesseldorf?"

"Yes, most high-born."

The landlord, more discreet than the driver, had already discovered that his guests were noble and not shop-keepers as their dress implied.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"A splendid gentleman—one of the old kind."

"What is that?"

"He would buy all the wine in my house, if the whim took him, and make all the town drunk."

"Has he been here lately?"

The landlord's eyes wandered away.

"How can I tell? Am I a man to watch the doings of a noble gentleman like that?"

"Then he has not been here?"

"No, most high-born one."

Olaf saw that the landlord was lying.

"Then Prince Gavril has gone back to St. Petersburg, has he?"

"Yes, most high-born one."

"I suppose you saw his servant, Fedor Ivanovitch, with him, when he was here yesterday," observed Olaf, nonchalantly.

The landlord was taken unawares, but never hesitated.

"Of course a gentleman never goes from home without a servant."

"And the girl, Sofia Ivanowna, she was with him too, is it not so?"

The landlord stared.

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind. Was she not with him?"

"Whatever your nobility pleases to say. It is not for me to contradict."

Tekli Aga softly pulled Olaf's sleeve and the swordmaster took the hint.

"You can go, landlord."

"The prince passed through here," said Tekli Aga quietly, as soon as the landlord had left the room; "but whether he went to Viatha or Novogorod I cannot tell."

"How do you know that?"

"Because the landlord would not answer. These Russians are all liars, and he took you for a police spy."

"Why?"

"Because of your foreign tongue. Any one can tell you are not a born Russian, my friend. You must change your character if you hope to find this prince."

Olaf was somewhat mortified at the frankness of the Circassian; but he agreed to the proposition that he should change his character. In truth the peaceful guise in which he drove along was to him an annoyance and vexation.

After a little discussion it was resolved that he should take the dress of a foreign officer, in which he would excite attention but no suspicion, and that settled—he and Tekli Aga strolled out into the town to take a look at the place.

They were lounging about the market square, when they heard the beat of a drum and saw a party of soldiers coming through, headed by four mounted Cossacks under a corporal, and followed by a long procession of men, walking two and two.

"Who are those?" asked Olaf.

"Prisoners, on the way to Siberia," was the gloomy answer of the Circassian.

Then he added bitterly:

"And of course some of our fools too."

"What fools, Tekli?"

"Circassians. Siberia is full of them."

The old warrior, who had served so long in Russia that he had almost forgotten his native mountains, seemed to feel all the bitter past of slavery and injustice come over him as he looked at the lugubrious procession that defiled slowly by them.

There they were, old and young, peasants and nobles, men and women, robbers and murderers, with others whose only crime was a wish to see their country free, now bound together in a common lot of woe and degradation, plodding along on their way to prison and exile.

The Cossacks were always ready with their short whips to drive back any stragglers into the ranks, and the stolid foot soldiers who marched along on either flank, were equally ready to prod with their bayonets.

Tekli Aga sauntered toward them as they halted in the middle of the square, where the prisoners sunk down into a listless group, and a number of people gathered from all sides to stare and pity.

There is so much misery and injustice mixed up with Russian criminal law that the people themselves feel little repugnance toward the most repulsive of convicts, classing them all together as "unhappy ones."

Even the soldiers, though harsh on the march, wink at the little kindnesses done by the people to convicts on the road when a halt occurs; and the consequence was that, within a minute from the time when the prisoners sunk wearily down, they were surrounded by visitors, receiving presents of food and money, and conversing freely.

Olaf hung on the skirts of the crowd; but Tekli Aga, more used to Russian manners, went into the midst of them, and Olaf saw him conversing earnestly with two men whose slim figures, classic features, and black hair and eyes, showed them to be of the Caucasian race.

After a little while the mountaineer came out; but as he departed Olaf saw him give money to his two countrymen.

There was a gleam of unusual excitement and exultation in Tekli Aga's face as he came to Olaf.

"King of the sword," he said, in a low tone, "I have news for thee. The prince stole the jewels."

"How do you know?"

"Come to the inn and I will tell you. None must hear us."

Olaf followed him to the inn, and when they were locked up, Tekli said:

"You saw me speak to those two men?"

"Yes; who were they?"

"One was Alei, the son of Seyd, who used to be in the Grand Duke Michael's company of guards; the other was Nourra, who comes from the same village as myself in the Caucasus."

"Well, and what have they done?"

"Alei was a deserter, who went home and joined the rebellious tribes, but Nourra had been a rebel all his life."

"And what do they know about this prince?"

"I will tell you. In the first place you know that it is the fashion for every Russian if he wants to be thought a great swell, to have a Circassian in his service."

"I did not know it."

"It was not so when you were here last, but there have been great changes since then."

Tekli Aga sighed as he said it. Olaf noticed that this veteran, who as a boy had been devoted to infatuation to his Russian master, the

Grand Duke Constantine, now seemed gloomy and dissatisfied with Russia.

"Yes," he went on; "in those days we, who were friends of Russia, were honored, and those of our brothers who were enemies were treated as honorable soldiers. Now all is changed. The Russians pretend to own our land and treat our warriors as rebels. They send the prisoners to Siberia to herd with thieves and murderers. Nourra is one of these."

"But what has that to do with—"

"The prince? I'll tell you. Nourra was taken prisoner once before, when this Prince Gavril was in the Caucasus, and the young man, who was in the guards, took a whim to buy him of his escort as they went to Siberia."

"To buy him?"

"Yes. Did you never hear of buying a man to go to Siberia?"

"Never. Tell me how it is done?"

"Easy enough. You must know Russia is a very poor country."

"I see that already."

"The people have so little money they would do anything to get enough to get drunk upon. That's the way it happens."

"What happens?"

"The exchanging. You see that the sergeant of the escort may have two or three hundred prisoners, and has no time to learn all their faces on his journey, before he turns them over to the escort of the next province."

"Yes, I understand that."

"But he calls the roll night and morning."

"Well, what of that?"

"And as long as the roll is answered, he does not care who answers, so that no number is missing. Now a good many of the prisoners have money, and it is quite common for the richer prisoners, who have long terms, to hire poorer men with shorter terms to exchange with them, to answer their names and suffer their term."

"Yes, I can see that would be easy."

"And Prince Nesseldorf, who wanted a good handsome Circassian, had only to hire some stupid ignorant brute of a Russian to take Nourra's place."

It was noticeable that Tekli always spoke with great contempt of the Russians.

"And that's the way Nourra came to be in the prince's service, brother. But this prince, it seems, is a regular madman in his whims, and does nothing but gamble, drink, fight, carry off girls by love or by force, and in short behaves like a madman. He thought he had Nourra safe and that he could treat him like a Russian. So one day he struck Nourra with a whip, and the end of it was that Nourra stabbed him five times, left him for dead, and ran away with Alei to the hills."

"And what had Alei done?"

"Shot his colonel, that's all. He is sentenced to five thousand blows of the stick and Nourra is to have one thousand of the rod."

"Which is the worst?"

"The rod. It will kill him surely."

"And how do these men know the prince stole the jewels so lately?"

"Because they saw him only yesterday."

"Where?"

"On the road from Kostroma, and he had the black pearl set in a pin in his shirt front, while the diamond was on his hand. He is a maniac for his impudence."

CHAPTER V.

PRINCE GAVRIL.

WHEN Olaf had heard this story he was at first inclined to disbelieve it; but his friend Tekli Aga assured him that there was no end to the mad freaks of Russian nobles of wealth, when they chose to misbehave.

"This young prince came of age three years ago and his father died two years since. He has an income of four million rubles a year and nothing to spend it on but himself. He has German blood in him; but is after all a Russian to the backbone, and his whole idea of enjoyment consists in doing something that will make people talk about him—if badly, so much the better."

"And now tell me how you know he stole the jewels? I thought you said Nourra left him for dead."

"So he did; but leaving a man for dead is not killing him. The prince was drunk, and Nourra struck wild, and only gave flesh wounds. He fainted from loss of blood. He got well in six months, and Nourra was taken and judged guilty of attempt to murder. So he goes to Siberia."

"But the jewels; what about them?"

"I am coming to them, brother. It seems that though the people don't know of the robbery it has got out among the convicts in some way; there is no telling how these things fly. And they knew that there was to be an attempt to carry off the crown itself."

"Indeed, then one of their friends must have been into it. There's no witchcraft about this, Tekli. They couldn't know it unless some one told them."

"That may be, brother. They do know it, and Nourra recognized the jewels, as I have told you, just now."

"But why didn't Nourra call out to the guard and have the prince arrested?"

Tekli smiled grimly.

"You don't know the convicts, brother. Why should such an one endanger his back for the sake of the Czar?"

"Endanger his back?"

"Yes. The guard would not believe a convict against a nobleman and an officer of the Imperial Guard."

"Then, what have we got to do, Tekli?"

"Follow the prince and arrest him."

"Of course. That's what we came out for. But to arrest him we must find him. Where has he gone to?"

"Nishni Novogorod."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know him."

"I don't comprehend—"

"That's because you don't understand a Russian as I do."

"Tell me then, why?"

"The prince has been drunk for some months and is wild to do something that will make people talk about him."

"Hasn't he done enough yet?"

"No. He has stolen the crown jewels, but he needs yet a little more notoriety. He doesn't like to have the fact kept secret as we have kept it secret. So he is going to flaunt his jewels at the fair in Novogorod, on purpose to defy arrest and have his name trumpeted all over Europe."

Olaf listened and looked thoughtful for some minutes. At last he burst out:

"That is not human nature. He cannot hope to escape forever. There is something behind all this."

"What is it, brother?"

"I do not know, yet; but he does not expect to defy arrest forever. He cannot wish to be sent to Siberia."

"Who knows, brother?"

"I know. At all events, I'm going after him to Novogorod and I want you with me at once. We can get horses and ride. We've slept so long in the telega that I could keep awake for another week."

"Very good, brother."

Within an hour after that, the two travelers, transformed into an officer of the staff and his servant, were riding away to Nishni Novogorod over a road so much better than their previous experience had led them to expect, that Olaf recognized he must be coming near a town of much traffic.

They reached Novogorod next day, and found themselves in the midst of a crowd, for the fair had begun and a quarter of a million of people were in and near the town, in houses, tents, booths, and all sorts of habitations.

They rode into the town, put up at one of the principal hotels, and instituted immediate inquiries for Prince Gavril Nesseldorf.

Neither of them had ever seen him, and they had only his description to go by.

They learned that he had taken up his quarters at the "Czarevitch," the largest hotel in the place, and was holding a grand carnival there.

Immediately Olaf ordered his baggage to be moved to the same place, and went there himself.

The first person he saw at the door was a tall, handsome young man, florid of face, with light curly hair.

This young man was dressed in the rich costume of a Russian gentleman of the old school, blazing with gold lace, and very different from the attire of a St. Petersburg exquisite; and he wore on his face a look of studied insolence and haughty pride that was of itself an aggression.

In fact, for the first time since the old swordmaster had entered Russia, things began to look like a fight, and Olaf felt his spirits rising.

He came up to the door of the hotel, with Tekli Aga, in the guise of his servant, following him with his saddle-bags; but the young man never stirred to make way. He only squared himself in the passage and stared insolently at Olaf.

The swordmaster presented the outward appearance of a humble lieutenant of engineers, or a civil official—for in Russia uniforms are not confined to the army—and it was with the politest of smiles that he removed his cap, saying:

"Will it please the honorable gentleman to allow me to pass in?"

"No," was the laconic reply.

Olaf smiled again more politely.

"Perhaps I mistake. This should be an inn, free to all, but it may be your honorable house."

"It is an inn," replied the other with a yawn, as he drew out a toothpick.

"Then of course I can enter," observed the swordmaster, smiling.

"No," retorted the other coolly.

"And why not?"

"Because I say you shall not."

"Then am I to understand that your honorable suite occupies all the inn?"

"No."

"Then what am I to understand?"

"That you can't come in."

"Indeed?"

"Exactly. So go somewhere else, before I take a stick to you, you quill-driving *tchinovnik*."

A *tchinovik* is a civil office-holder, a clerk of some sort, bitterly despised by the military.

Olaf laughed heartily. His disguise, at all events was a good one.

The young man heard him laugh, and looked down at him with an expression full of angry scorn.

"How dare you laugh?" he asked.

The Dane pretended to be doubled up with laughter, and ejaculated at last:

"Oh, your nobility is so funny to us poor clerks. It is worth half a ruble to come and see you play the clown."

The young man's florid face turned a vivid scarlet with anger, and he turned to the house, roaring.

"Peter, Ivan, Matias, Gregory, come here; bring me a stick, I want to beat a *tchinovik*."

As soon as Olaf heard that, he became grave at once; stepped up to the young man, and called out sternly:

"Be silent. I am no *tchinovik*. I am a soldier. You will apologize at once, or I must chastise you."

"Chastise me!" fairly shouted the young man, starting back. "We'll see."

In another moment a servant had handed him a stick, and he rushed at the swordmaster.

But Olaf had not been bred a master of all weapons for forty years to fear a green Russian debauchee; and before the stick could fall he had grasped it all of a sudden, brought it under his own arm with both hands, and torn it away with a sudden jerk.

The angry young man jumped back for a moment, as if lost, when deprived of his stick, and made a furious open-handed blow at Olaf's face.

With a swift duck of the head the active swordmaster evaded the blow, and the next moment had risen up inside the other's guard.

Olaf was sorely tempted to give this insolent youth one of his terrible face blows, but he remembered that it was not his cue to fight on this occasion, and contented himself with a single dig into the pit of the other's stomach, just on the "mark," under which the aggressive young Russian instantly turned very pale, and sunk down with a grunt of pain.

Enfeebled as he was by long dissipation, it only needed a single blow in the right place to take all the fight out of him.

Olaf looked at him as he sat there, and smiled in the old fashion.

"Ah, my little lamb," he said, "did you think you could slap the old man's face? No, my son, no. Better men than you have tried that. And now who are you?"

"You shall find out very soon," groaned the other, as he sat on the ground. "I'll show you before I've done that Prince Gavril Nesseldorf is not the man to be assaulted with impunity by a cursed *tchinovik*."

"Aha! so you are Prince Gavril that I have been looking for so long," said Olaf in his sweetest tones. "I am told you have in your possession something that does not exactly belong to you."

The prince could make no answer; for the pain of the blow had already set him to squaring his accounts with the last bottle of champagne, and he was very miserable.

But Olaf, and Tekli Aga, watching him closely, could see no signs of the jewels about him. and Olaf, concluding it would cost some time and danger to arrest him and find them, took the next best course and walked into the hotel, where he called for the landlord and demanded a room, no matter who else was in the house.

The landlord was evidently very much frightened; for the mad prince had been doing about as he pleased, and had bullied every one around.

He hemmed and hawed and tried to make excuses; but it was no avail.

Olaf cracked his riding whip, and swore he would flog every soul in the house if he didn't have a room in one minute, and the landlord admitted that he had plenty, but that the prince had sworn to cut his ears off if he let any one in.

"You have not let me in. I came in by myself," retorted the swordmaster; "and as for your prince cutting any one's ears off, just look at him now, and see if he's at all likely to fight."

The landlord made no more hesitation then, and took Olaf to the best room he had left, where the swordmaster deposited his baggage and then went out to see the prince once more.

He found him recovered from his temporary sickness and crazy for revenge.

He had just taken a heavy drink of brandy to get back his spirits, and was calling aloud to his servant, of whom he had three present, to get their sticks and "drive this insolent *tchinovik* out of the house."

Olaf found them almost ready to obey, and, as before, the notion of a fight raised his spirits at once.

He stalked up to the vaporing prince, who was half-a-head taller than himself and a good fifty pounds heavier, and touched him on the shoulder.

"See here, my friend, you will stop your noise and send your men away."

The prince instantly turned on him and at-

tempted to grapple; but again the veteran's tricks were one too many.

With a push on the chest and a rapid trip, before the other could catch him he laid the prince on his back with a shock that made all the windows rattle and left him breathless and half-stunned.

Then he turned like a tiger on the three servants, who, in their stolid Russian way, were quite willing to fight, but entirely ignorant of the boxing art.

Crack! crack!

With a right-hander at one and a kick in the other's stomach, down went two of them, and the other one ran as hard as he could, while Tekli Aga looking gravely on, said:

"My brother has not forgotten his cunning, yet."

Olaf laughed in the fierce way he had when his blood was up.

"Come, get out of this; run, you dogs," he cried, and the dismayed servants got up and ran away, while the prince rose slowly to his feet and stood staring stupidly at him.

But Olaf had not come to that hotel to do nothing but fight, and now he totally changed his manner and went up to the astonished Russian.

He held out his hand, saying:

"Come, brave men bear no malice. We have fought. We are both soldiers. Now is the time to drink together."

The Russian's face broke into a smile.

"Then you are not a *tchinovik*?"

"Of course not. Down with *tchinoviks*! Did you ever see a *tchinovik* who could fight? I am a soldier and a swordmaster, and you were a fool to fight me."

The prince grinned a little more and then broke out into a laugh.

"A swordmaster!" he cried; "then you are my brother. I've wanted a swordmaster all these years, and couldn't find one. I forgive you, and you shall come and live with me. I tell you I can pay you better than the Czar himself."

"How much can you pay me?" asked the Dane, cautiously.

It was his object to ingratiate himself with this drunken spendthrift, and find why he had stolen the jewels, if he had, and where they were; for he could see no signs of them all this time.

"How much do you want?" asked the prince, in a thick voice.

"A thousand rubles a month," said the Dane, at a venture, asking an enormous price in the hope it would be refused.

"I'll pay it," said the other, with drunken decision. "You shall have the first month as soon as we get to Ekaterineburg. Now call the landlord. I'm thirsty."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO OLD FOOLS AND A YOUNG KNAVE.

LONG before nightfall the prince was quite drunk, and had been lavish in his confidences to the wily swordmaster. He had told him all about his private affairs; how his father had died; how his only sister was married to General Akimitch in the Caucasus, whom he hated; how he was taking home to his estates the prettiest Gipsy girl in the whole of Russia, on purpose to make his neighbor, Count Strogonoff, jealous; how he had the finest horses in Russia, the very best Orloff trotters.

He told him everything imaginable, without any trouble beyond leading the conversation in that direction; but not a word could Olaf get out of him about jewels.

As soon as the conversation went in that direction, he would begin to brag about his gold mines, and Olaf became convinced that he knew more about the stolen diamond and pearl than he cared to tell.

But why had he stolen them, and where were they?

That was what puzzled Olaf; and at last, when his new acquaintance was pretty thoroughly fuddled, he came out with the plump question:

"Were you in the crown room at the Winter Palace a few days ago, prince?"

Nesseldorf did not turn his head, but kept on gazing fiercely at the wall.

"Did I go to the crown room? Did I? Did I?" he asked, thickly. "Why shouldn't I go to it?"

"Then you were there?"

"You say so, swordmaster; and I never say no when a better fencer than I says yes."

"Then where are the jewels you stole from the crown?" asked Olaf, fiercely; "and why did you give a false name?"

"Why did I give a false name? Did I give a false name, swordmaster?"

He seemed to be very stupid now, but Olaf could see him trying to clinch his teeth and stiffen up—a matter of extreme difficulty in his peculiar condition.

"You did," replied Olaf, watching him closely. "You gave the name of Gavril Somoff."

Drunk as he was, the prince started violently, and then asked incautiously:

"Who told you?"

"The same person who told me a great deal

more about you," replied Olaf, sternly. "Come now, where are they?"

"Where are what? I declare I don't know what you mean, swordmaster. What is the reason you persecute me with such talk? I'm thirsty."

And nothing more could be got out of him, for, in ten minutes after, he was lying dead drunk on the floor, and Olaf called for his servants to put him to bed, which they did with a skill and patience that showed the effect of long practice.

Then Olaf, having run his quarry to earth, sought his own couch and slept soundly until the morning rays shone in at the window, when he woke up with a start, realizing that the house was very quiet.

Not a sound was to be heard, down or upstairs, and he jumped out of bed with a sense of some impending evil, calling aloud for Tekli Aga.

But the Circassian seemed to be sleeping even more soundly than himself, and it was not without much shaking that he roused him out of his slumbers, when Tekli protested:

"By the beard of Schamyl, my old chief, they must have put poppies in our drink last night; for my head seems ready to swim round this morning."

Then the veteran swordsman too became conscious of a peculiar dryness in his own mouth, such as he remembered once before from being drugged in a Mexican *posada*, and he stamped his foot angrily, crying: "Tekli, by the great roost of Saint James, they have fooled us. The bird has flown."

And, sure enough, when they went downstairs, they found the house empty, of all but the landlord and his people, who informed them that the prince and his suite had taken the road for St. Petersburg at daybreak.

For one moment Olaf and Tekli Aga were completely dumfounded, and stood staring at each other.

Then the swordmaster burst out into a deep and particularly earnest torrent of Danish and Spanish oaths, intermingled with English—for in his various travels he had learned to talk a number of languages indifferently ill, so that he had nearly forgotten his own native tongue.

He cursed himself for a pig, a fool, an idiot, to let a boy get the best of him in such a style, and finally he took Tekli's arm and hurried him away to their room, where he locked the door.

"For we need counsel," he said.

He had become an inveterate smoker in his travels, and he lit a cigar and smoked it in a furious manner, chewing at the end and sending out clouds of smoke till his irritation had calmed down and he could think. Then he turned to Tekli Aga.

"They have beaten the old man, brother."

"Two old men," sententiously replied Tekli.

"Yes, both of us; but you are not to blame. You have seen nothing of the world outside of St. Petersburg. I am the man that ought to get the stick."

"Take comfort, brother. Any man may be deceived—"

"Once—yes. But we have not done with this young man yet, Tekli."

Tekli Aga smiled grimly; his nearest approach to a laugh.

"I think not, brother."

"What do you advise, Tekli, now?"

"To follow him back to the city, brother."

"Do you think he has gone there?"

"So the landlord says."

"Ay, and after they have fooled us once. Not a second time, I thank you."

Tekli Aga looked puzzled.

"I don't understand, brother."

"Of course not. The message was meant to deceive us."

"How do you know, brother?"

"Because I have seen the world outside of Russia."

"Where then has the prince gone?"

"For the frontier, or else into Siberia."

Tekli looked amazed.

"Explain."

"Easily done. Before we came here he thought no one knew of his theft. The silence of the papers and police about it, deceived him. He must have been drunk when he met the convicts. Last night he found out from my question that the theft was known."

"Well, brother?"

"Well, and he fooled me."

"How, brother?"

"By pretending to be dead drunk and drugging my drink. He must have a head like a rock."

"Well, brother?"

"Well, hereafter he will have to keep clear of us. He knows us and we know him. He cannot go back to St. Petersburg; because they are all waiting for him. He is not safe from arrest anywhere in Russia. He must either get to the German frontier or flee to his estates in Siberia and trust to his tenants to defend him from the police."

"They will not fight, brother."

"Well, we must find which way he has gone. I think it is to the East, for on the other road he would run into police all the time. Besides,

he knows that what we want are the jewels, not him, and he has a woman with him, a woman he loves. He will not run the risk of immediate arrest."

"Why not, brother?"

"Because he is young, and all young men are fools when they are in love. He would sooner take this Gipsy girl to his estates and enjoy a fool's paradise for a few weeks, with the sure prospect of arrest at the end of it, than to brave a contest in three days on the road to freedom. I tell you the man's nerve is all gone with his drinking."

"And you think—"

"I think he's gone to Siberia. Another thing—he trusts to be able to bribe the police to silence if they come after him, but he knows he cannot trust to that with a foreigner like me."

"That is true, brother. He could buy all the *tchinoviks* like so many sheep or cattle."

"But he cannot buy me, Tekli. I am going to arrest him and bring him back. On my word, things begin to look like a fight. Are you ready to follow me anywhere?"

"I am, brother."

"Very well then. We want more money and several things. Let us go to the chief of police at once."

They found what was better for their purposes, the governor of the town, who was at first disposed to be very stiff with the two strangers but who softened down as soon as he saw the credentials by which they were accompanied.

He undertook to find out for them in a half-hour whither the prince had gone and at what time.

"For I control all the police of this town and district," he proudly said.

Olaf shrugged his shoulders.

"I will wait the half-hour; but you will not find out," he said.

"Why not?" asked the governor, in a tone of displeasure and surprise.

"You will see when they come back. Then I will tell you. In the mean time I'll smoke a cigar."

At the end of half an hour the governor's head clerk came into the room.

"The men are ready to report, most high-born one."

The governor turned on Olaf.

"You see? I tell you, you do not know my power yet."

Olaf smiled tranquilly.

"Let me hear the report first."

The different officers and sergeants filed in with military stiffness and made their reports successively.

"On the Provolskoi road nothing but wagons from the fair. No gentlemen."

"On the Vladimir road, no gentlemen."

"On the Yelatna road only the Baron Esteroff and some peasants with their cattle."

"On the Trennikoff road, peasants."

"On the Kazan road, Persians and peasants, with the tax officer. No gentlemen."

"On the Viatka road, peasants and a column of convicts. No one else."

"Is that all?" asked Olaf, as the last man saluted.

"Yes, most high-born one," chorused the stiff men in green uniforms.

"Very well, then, you are a parcel of liars," retorted the swordmaster coolly, "and you will now tell me just how many rubles Prince Nesseldorf has distributed among you to shut your mouths up."

The governor looked shocked.

"Consider, colonel—" he began.

Olaf turned on him savagely.

"Hold your tongue. Do you remember the terms of the order under which I ask? I, too, may have a report to make to his majesty of the way in which he is served. Come now, which of you men went out on the Viatka road?"

All the men were silent.

The Viatka road was the one that led toward Siberia.

Olaf turned to the governor.

"I thought we should hunt them to earth. Show me which man was detailed to report on the Viatka road."

The governor beckoned.

"Stand out, Sergeant Petroff."

Sergeant Petroff with a face like a colored plaster cast with boiled eyes, stepped out and saluted.

"Tell the others to go away, and remain within call of the bell."

The governor so ordered.

"Now, sergeant, report on the Viatka road. What went out since midnight?"

"Three merchants going to Tobolsk, a herd of cattle, peasants with carts and some Kirghiz Tartars who had been to St. Petersburg on a mission."

"Is that all, Petroff?"

"All, most high-born one."

"Then what made you say in your other report, peasants and a column of convicts?" asked the Dane sharply.

"I said no such thing, most high-born one," was the particularly cool answer.

"Then you mean to say I am a liar?"

"By no means, most high-born. But even the Czar makes mistakes sometimes."

Olaf could not help smiling at the adroit way in which his question was parried.

"Report again on the Viatka road. Who passed since midnight?"

"Three Persians going to Bokhara by way of Tobolsk, two herds of cattle—"

"Enough!" interrupted Olaf. "Governor, give him the sticks at once."

The governor hesitated.

"I cannot without degrading him."

"Then degrade him. I am going to have out of him the truth about the Viatka road. You understand, I, too, have a report to make if I find my orders disputed."

The governor ground his teeth, but was obliged to submit. In truth this Dane was carrying things in a very un-Russian manner.

He sounded a hand bell and a stiff corporal came in followed by two men with ratans.

"Tell them to obey my orders," said Olaf in a stern tone.

"You will do as this gentleman tells you," was the stiff answer of the governor.

"Take that sergeant, lay him on the table and cane him till I tell you to stop," said Olaf sternly.

The sergeant stood up as stiff as a poker, but his eyes began to roll.

In a trice the corporal and his assistants had seized him, with a dexterity born of long practice and had him stretched on the punishment table, face down, with his hands and feet secured.

"Now let him have it."

The ratans descended and for some seconds the sergeant maintained a grim silence, grinding his teeth hard; but as the flogging went on in the same place he began to writhe and twist and finally broke out into roars of pain.

"Have mercy on me, most high-born one. Spare my life and I will tell all! Oh Holy St. Vassili protect me!"

"Who passed out on the Viatka road to-day since midnight?" asked Olaf in his most impassive manner. "Go on, men, give it to him well."

The sergeant ground his teeth and kept silence for ten seconds more, but at last burst out:

"Don't kill me and I'll tell all. Only just let me up."

"Tell now," was the only response, and the ratans kept up such a merry dance on the poor sergeant that at last he roared out:

"Prince Gavril Nesseldorf and all his suite passed out to Viatka an hour after midnight."

"Stop!" said Olaf and the ratans ceased to fall.

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because I forgot it, most high-born one."

"Go on," said Olaf sternly.

Again the ratans descended and the poor sergeant yelled out:

"Because the prince gave us money not to tell."

"How much money? Go on, corporal."

"Oh mercy, most high-born one! I will tell. Indeed it was only ten rubles a man to each of us and a hundred more for the governor."

"Stop, corporal," commanded Olaf with a malicious smile. "Let the servant rise. Governor, I am much obliged to you for your politeness. Be pleased to accept the assurance of my highest consideration. We will go to Viatka. I want the two best horses in Nishni Novogorod to proceed on my journey."

The governor had turned all sorts of colors; but as Olaf made no remark on the luckless sergeant's confession, neither did the governor offer any comments.

Within three hours after, the veteran swordmaster and his Circassian ally, well-mounted on stout Russian horses were trotting away on the road to Viatka on the trail of Prince Gavril Nesseldorf.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCE'S HOLD.

In the midst of a beautifully wooded and picturesque country, with blue hills, smiling valleys and noble forests, rose a pile of buildings that had been erected, in the days of the Emperor Paul, for the hereditary princes of the great house of Nesseldorf, by a French architect.

In those days everything French was in fashion; for it was during the consulate of General Bonaparte, and the emperor was particularly fond of France.

When Paul came to his end in the Summer Palace, the elder Prince Nesseldorf had been one of the party that saw him die; and he had been raised to high honors by the Czar Alexander the First, along with the Orloffs and one or two others.

Siberia was then a place but little known to the rest of the empire, and it was easy to give away immense tracts of land there, though few Russian nobles cared to live in such a desolate region as it was reputed to be.

Prince Ivan Nesseldorf was one of the few. He had been made Governor of all Western Siberia and had discovered it to be in reality a very beautiful land.

In fact there is a great margin for choice in Siberia, as in North America; for one is nearly as big as the other.

To a man who had seen nothing of our continent but the alkali plains and the Dry Belt to the east of the Rocky mountains, America would present a picture of great desolation; a man who had never lived outside of the Atlantic States would call it a garden.

So in Siberia.

The western provinces round Tobolsk and near the Ural Mountains are full of beauty, with a delightful climate, though cold in winter—no colder than our own Minnesota.

To a man who is not a prisoner, Siberia may prove a very pleasant place.

So Prince Ivan found it, and here in the midst of an estate covering nearly a million of acres, he had built him a palace such as was not elsewhere in the country.

It was constructed of colored marble, hewn from the quarries all round them; it had chambers paneled with porphyry and malachite from the same place; it was full of imported French mirrors and costly furniture, and it was surrounded by a park four miles square.

In this park, now the abode of Prince Gavril, grandson of the original Ivan, the early spring of Siberia had come down with a rush.

The river Irtysh, broad and sluggish, divided the park from the broad steppes of the Kirghiz and the whole estate lay between the foot-hills of the Ural, and the great green sea of the steppe, with civilization on one side, the desert on the other.

As far as the eye could see from the towers of the palace the steppe was a wilderness of flowers with a few dark groups of black beehives scattered at intervals of twenty or thirty miles from each other. These black beehives were the felt tents of the wandering Kirghiz, the only inhabitants of that sea of flowers.

The breeze which came from the south-east brought to the palace the sweet smell of wild pinks and carnations, and the birds were singing in the last oak trees to be seen after the Irtysh was crossed, for Nesseldorf Palace stood on the confines of Europe and Asia, beyond which the oak vanishes.

Prince Gavril Nesseldorf was standing on the top of a square tower at one end of the palace, looking out over the landscape.

He looked, for a wonder, sober; and as if he had been sober at least a week.

When he was sober he was a remarkably handsome young man, with a pale, aristocratic face, fair, curly hair, a blonde mustache and fierce blue eyes that could be very soft and melting when they chose.

They chose to, just then, for the prince had his arm around the waist of one of the most beautiful of women and he was talking love to her.

And yet her dress proclaimed her only a Gipsy girl, one of those Tchigani, who are universally despised in Russia as strolling minstrels and dancers, sorcerers and everything low. Even below the Jews, who are the football of Russia.

Yet Sofia Ivanowna was fit to be a model for a Southern Venus, with her lithe graceful form, tiny hands and feet, oval face, regular features, white teeth and great dark eyes, while her shining black hair, when it was cast loose, touched the ground.

Physically Sofia the Tsigana was perfection; mentally, she was as sharp as a Frenchwoman, reckless as a Dane, and perfidious as only a Gipsy can be.

Her dress was the same as that worn by all her tribe in shape and color, well suiting her dark brilliant beauty, principally scarlet and yellow; but the materials were costly silks and satins such as no Gipsy could afford.

And on her brow set in a gold circlet was the celebrated Black Pearl of Kazan, while the Orloff diamond shone from the brooch that fastened her bodice at the top.

"What a grand, brave fellow you are, my Gavrilka," she was saying to him, "to run into all this danger for me; and how proud I am of you! How envious Count Strogonoff and that odious Stefana will be."

Count Strogonoff was the richest man in the Ural district, and it had always been Nesseldorf's ambition to beat him in extravagance.

"Yes," he observed, complacently, "Strogonoff can brag as much as he pleases about his losses at play and how he laughs at them. But his Stefana has neither the face, the shape nor the hair that you have, and as for singing, she is not a patch on you."

"And I can beat her in dancing, my Gavrilka, can I not?"

"Easily, my turtle dove."

"And you love me better than all else?"

"Better than my life, Sofia."

"Not than your life, Gavrilka."

"Yes, indeed; for I have risked it to please you."

"You mean by stealing the crown jewels."

"Yes, indeed."

"But what fun we had doing it."

Gavril laughed heartily.

"Yes, indeed; you charmed the sentry while I snatched the jewels out of the setting. It is not every man could do it."

"Why not, Gavrilka?"

"It needs strength. Now, there's Orloff—"

"Oh, I hate Orloff."

"All right. I want you to hate him. But he is a strong fellow, who boasts he can break silver rubles with his fingers all day long. I can do it once or twice and I can crush a goblet in my hand when I wish. But to twist a diamond out of its heavy gold setting, and still more, that pearl with a single wrench, before the sentry could notice anything, that was a feat."

"Of course it was."

"And the worst of it all is that it can only end in a convict prison unless I am shot for it."

"What do you mean, Gavrilka?"

"I mean that it was found out—how, I cannot tell, but it is known in St. Petersburg and the police are after me."

"Well, you can bribe them to silence."

"Yes, if all were Russians."

"But are they not?"

"No, one is a Dane, and that is the worst of it for these Danes are devils."

"How do you know, Gavrilka?"

"I've been in Denmark and I've heard of this fellow. He is a great fighter."

"But if he cannot be bribed he can be killed, Gavrilka."

"Yes, that is my only chance to—"

"To what?"

"To enjoy a few more weeks with thee, my flower, my pigeon, my pearl, my lovely wild bird," he fondly said hugging her up closely in his arms.

"After all it must end, but I'll fight it off as long as I can."

He seemed so certain of ultimate failure that the girl asked him curiously:

"Why do you say it must end, Gavrilka? Is it impossible to live here forever?"

"It is impossible for a Russian to escape the hand of the Czar, unless he become an exile," he answered.

"Why?"

"Because the Czar is like God—his hand is everywhere," answered the young noble with a reverent air.

The girl curled her rich red lip and looked out over the free Kirghiz steppe.

"There are men there whom the Czar cannot reach," she retorted.

"You are wrong. Every tribe on the steppe pays tribute to the Czar."

"But suppose they should refuse?"

"Then Cossacks and cannon would be on their trail; their flocks and herds destroyed and they driven out to starve."

She looked sober.

"Does that always happen?"

"Always."

"Then, Gavrilka, you were a fool to offend the Czar for me."

"You wanted the jewels and I took the risk," he answered, simply. "A lover counts no danger too great to please the woman he adores."

She turned away her head. For a moment even her shallow pleasure-loving nature was touched by the perfect self-abandonment of his devotion.

Then, Gipsy-like, she turned to the present hour for enjoyment.

"How long, think you, you can defy arrest, Gavrilka?" she asked.

"If they send none but Russians after me, three years," he replied.

"But if this Dane comes?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"On whether I can kill him or not."

"Well, if you kill him?"

"Then the full three years, possibly four."

"But otherwise?"

"Three days," he answered in a gloomy tone. Sofia started and turned pale.

"Three days."

"Yes. If he comes, as he may with a regiment and a battery to back him, what can I do against him? Nothing but lock my doors and see the house battered down."

Sofia looked thoughtful, for the first time perhaps in her volatile life.

"That is, if he comes with a regiment and a battery," she said, musingly.

"Yes. If he comes alone, as he may—for I am told he is a perfect dare-devil—we must kill him."

"We will, Gavrilka."

She said it as coolly as if she were a butcher, talking of killing a sheep.

Presently the prince became uneasy, and took up a large double field-glass that lay on the stone balustrade.

"Some one is coming through the park now," he said.

The girl looked in the same direction, and her keen vision distinguished two moving figures.

"If that be he, we have him," she said.

The prince took a long, thirsty look.

"It is he, on a good horse, well-armed, in the uniform of a hussar officer, with a Circassian in armor beside him."

And as he shut up the glass, the girl saw that his hand was trembling.

Her red lip curled again.

"You are not afraid of two men, Gavrilka?"

He flushed angrily.

"Afraid! Do you think I'm a coward? Have I shown fear yet?"

"No, and yet—"

"And yet what? Do you want me to go out with my men and open fire on these two at once?"

"No, for they would run away."

"Yes, and come back with more."

"Very true, Gavrilka. We must entice them in and then kill them."

"But not without learning if they are to be followed by others."

"Leave them to me, Gavrilka. I will do the charming, and you shall kill them."

He looked relieved. Indeed, the moral effect of the presence of these two men, coming so boldly into the heart of his dominion, on the errand, as he knew, of arresting him, shook his nerves, already enfeebled by excessive drink and debauchery.

He knew that he had enough men to kill them ten times over; but he also knew that if these men were well known to the Governors of provinces they would be missed, and then there would be much hushing up to be done.

And though Gavril Nesseldorf had perpetrated most crimes of violence under the sun from sheer vanity and excess of animal spirits, he shrunk as yet from murder, on account of his native Russian superstition.

He remained upon the belvedere of the tower, watching the two men come in, and suffering the girl to go away. In truth, like most debauchees, he was a coward in the presence of real danger, unless stimulated up with liquor.

He had been sobered in the midst of all his orgie at Novogorod by finding out that Olaf knew of the robbery, and his fears had led him to the conclusion that the Dane was on the track of the jewels.

He had given them to the Gipsy girl partly out of love and vanity, partly to throw the blame on some one else; for there is nothing so meanly cowardly as your debauchee when caught where he can shift the blame, even onto the woman he loves.

He saw Olaf and the Circassian riding quietly along, apparently admiring the beautiful park, and saw Sofia go out to meet them in the park, riding on a bay pony Gipsy fashion.

He saw her join them, and all three stopped and conversed for some time, after which they rode on slowly to the house, and he heard Olaf's voice.

"Tell the honorable gentleman, my pretty damsel, that I have come to claim the place of swordmaster, which he promised me at Novogorod."

"Oh," he heard her say, "I shall be so glad to have some one here to enliven the place, for truly it is very stupid and the prince is the most stupid of all."

Gavril started and frowned. He did not like this and jealousy stung him at once. He shut up his glass with a bang and came down stairs, swelling with anger that overcame his fears, to find Olaf and Tekli Aga waiting, hat in hand, in the cool hall of the palace, while Sofia was hanging on the arm of the grizzled swordmaster, looking up into his face like a spoiled child pleading for a new toy.

The prince stalked proudly forward. "Who are you, sir?"

"Count Olaf Svenson, at your very honorable service," was the quiet reply of the Dane.

"What do you want here?"

"I have come at your invitation to take the place of swordmaster at a salary of one thousand rubles a month."

"Who is this man?"

"Tekli Aga, chief of the Czar's Circassian guard, and a friend of mine."

"Then take yourselves off. I have changed my mind," retorted the prince gruffly.

Then he said to the Gipsy girl.

"Sofia, come here."

The girl looked saucily round and shook her head with a smile.

Olaf on his part stiffened up.

"The honorable gentleman is pleased to be facetious. He forgets who I am."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the prince menacingly.

"I mean that I am the first master in Russia, and that a man, when he engages my services, must pay for them as he agrees, or he insults me."

"Insults you? Be insulted then?"

The prince set a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast which brought a dozen or twenty servants from all parts of the palace, carrying every variety of weapon.

"Turn out these villains," he cried in his fiercest tones pointing to Olaf, but to his surprise the men hesitated.

He looked at the swordmaster and saw that he and Tekli Aga had each drawn a pair of revolvers.

The swordmaster smiling blandly went on:

"Exactly! As we were saying at Novogorod when we were interrupted by too much brandy—you are to pay me a thousand rubles a month and I am to teach your honorable high-

ness to fence. You will please to send the men to their kitchens, prince. I am getting old and I am apt to shoot by accident when my hand is trembling."

"I tell you I have changed my mind. I want no fencing-master. I'll give you a year's salary and send you off."

The prince began to feel fearful again.

Olaf smiled and put back his pistol into his belt.

"Pardon me, your highness, but they have a saying in America, where I have served with some credit, that one should never swap horses crossing a stream. Both animals are like to be lost. I will enter on my duties first. If your highness sees fit to pay me a year in advance to-morrow, very good, but in the mean time it will be only common hospitality to say 'Colonel Svenson, dinner waits for us.' Besides I am an old soldier and the presence of a little witch like this—here he put one arm round Sofia's waist—makes me determined to stay. If your highness has all such pretty waiting maids as this I do not wonder you stay here."

The prince ground his teeth with fury. His jealousy and rage were working him up—Sofia had intended—till he had nearly overcome his fears, and he called out to his men:

"Get the rifles. Shoot these dogs down!"

Again they hesitated for Olaf had them covered again with his pistols.

"In America," he tranquilly pursued, "where they do a good deal of fighting they have a habit of never letting another man get the drop on you. Your men can go to the kitchen and to their work; but nowhere else."

Again the prince began to quake a little; and coming closer, asked in a low tone:

"How much will you take to go away from here and trouble me no more?"

"The diamond and the pearl," was the answer, in the same guarded way. "I do not wish to be hard on your highness, but those I must have."

The prince looked doubtfully at him for a moment and then at Sofia, who eyed him in a singular way.

At last he said with a sigh:

"You shall have them."

Then to his utter astonishment the Gipsy girl turned away from Olaf, came up to him and struck him in the face with her open palm, hissing out the single word:

"Coward!"

Under the insult he turned deadly pale, and the girl seized him by the arm and forced him back several steps, while she went on, her black eyes flashing.

"Yes, you are a brave man to dare love a Gipsy girl! Do you know you gave me, me, ME, those jewels? Do you think I'll let you give them back and be the scorn of all St. Petersburg? What will Strogonoff say? What will Stefana say? Here is a pretty prince who dare not fight for his girl, cowed down by one man in the midst of his servants! Out on you for a coward! Give up those jewels and I'll leave you and go with this man who has cowed you. I love a brave man! I would sooner live on the steppes with him than in a palace with a coward. Come, will you fight or not?"

Thus urged and taunted what could the weak prince do but yield and say to Olaf in a sullen tone:

"You can't have them. Shoot me if you like, but my men will avenge me."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE PALACE.

WHEN the swordmaster heard the prince thus fling down his defiance, he cast a glance of decided admiration on the Gipsy girl, and said aloud, as if to himself:

"Ah, what will not man do for a woman, and what cannot a woman do with a man? Your highness need not fear. I don't wish to shoot you; and as for your men, if I did kill you I could scare them off too. At present the question is: where are the jewels now?"

The prince noticed that the Gipsy girl, bold as she was, had yet taken them off and hidden them.

"I don't know where they are," he said boldly, and he told truth—for a little space of time at least.

Olaf Svenson bowed.

"I recognize the truth of what your highness has said. Therefore we will return to our original proposition. You did me the honor in Novogorod to engage me as swordmaster at a salary of one thousand rubles a month. I have come here to fulfill my part of the contract and take up my abode."

Prince Gavril looked doubtfully at him.

"I must have been drunk when I made you any such offer. I don't want you, I say."

"Then possibly your highness means to insinuate that I am incorrect in what I have stated," said Olaf inquiringly, with a peculiar dangerous glitter in his eyes. "I hope not, for your highness's sake; for I should not like to be compelled to call out a handsome young gentleman like your honorable self, and to kill him."

The prince "wilted" again. In truth, he was only brave up to a certain point.

"Of course if you tell me so, I believe you."

But who is this man with you? I did not engage him."

"That is my assistant and friend, Tekli Aga, without whom I never travel. He handles the saber in a way I have never seen equaled."

"Well, I don't want him."

"I have already observed to your highness that I never travel without Tekli Aga. I now add that he occupies the same room with me wherever I go."

The prince tried to face Olaf; but his eyes sunk under those of the swordmaster, who had come close up to him and was looking at him intently.

"Be it as you please," he said, "you can stay here, since I promised you."

"I thought your highness would listen to reason. Your honorable steward—what is his name?"

The prince took the hint.

"Fedor Ivanovitch, come here. Give these gentlemen quarters."

"Next to his highness, Fedor. It is the duty of a swordmaster to be always near to his employer to protect him against robbers or insurgents."

Olaf's face was as smiling as ever. He had cowed the prince and the steward was easy to manage.

As he and Tekli followed Fedor, the Dane whispered:

"This is the other man concerned in the robbery. Only Martin Petrovitch remains to find and I shall have all of the missing names in the crown room register."

Fedor was an ordinary Russian *mujek*, with snub nose and long beard, and his costume, which consisted of petticoat trousers of black velvet thrust into high brown boots, with a striped linen shirt worn outside the trousers, was the ordinary summer dress of a peasant.

He showed the swordmaster to a magnificent room with a sixteen-foot ceiling, where a huge four-post bedstead, with crimson silk hangings rose nearly to the top.

"This is the state bedroom, most high-born one," he said. "His highness is at the end of the corridor."

"This will do, friend Martin," was the smiling answer as Olaf slipped a ruble into his hand.

"Your nobility mistakes, I am Fedor, not Martin."

"Oh indeed, I thought you were Martin Petrovitch."

"No, most high-born one, Martin Petrovitch is body-servant to his highness; I am the steward of the estate and palace."

"Oh, that is it. But you go to St. Petersburg with your master?"

"Yes, most high-born one: I go whenever I am ordered."

"And Martin goes too?"

"Martin follows his lord wherever he goes, most high-born one."

"You had quite a nice journey the last time you went—eh Fedor?"

Fedor grinned.

"Indeed your nobility is right. Martin and I had all we could drink after our lord was made happy!"

"Made happy, how?"

Again Fedor grinned.

"The old story, most high-born one. The devil always comes to a young man in the form of a woman."

"Ah, you mean this Gipsy girl?"

Fedor pulled up and seemed to see that he had been saying too much.

"Your nobility is comfortable I hope. If your nobility has any orders to give, I, Fedor, will take them."

"See that our horses are fed well, and come back here in half an hour. I want to go all round the palace."

Fedor backed out and Olaf locked the door, then carefully examined all round the room and finally whispered to Tekli Aga:

"The servants know nothing about the robbery."

"How are you sure?"

"From the way that man talked. Only two are into it—the prince and the girl."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"Watch and keep away from home at night."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they will try to murder us to-night when we are asleep."

The Circassian started uneasily; but Olaf only laughed:

"Oh, that is nothing. I've had to sleep with one eye open and revolvers under my pillow for ever so many weeks at a time in the States of Mexico. These fellows are mere children in villainy to the Mexicans."

"Tell me what to do, brother, and I will obey your orders."

"Very good, Tekli. We will simply watch for events. Do you know these jewels when you see them?"

"I have seen them often in the crown."

"Very well. Whenever you see them seize them, unless I am there. In that case say to me: Behold them both!"

"I will, brother."

"If I am not there, seize them, no matter on whom they may be."

"I will, brother."

"And now let us wash off the dust and go to take a stroll, Tekli."

When they came out a little later, they found the palace to all appearance returned to its usual quiet. The servants had gone to the kitchen or about their various avocations and the prince was nowhere to be seen. They roamed through a suite of lofty and magnificent drawing-rooms, that looked singularly out of place in the midst of the wilderness of Siberia within sight of the Kirghiz steppes and finally were about to call for Fedor when they saw the Gipsy girl Sofia coming toward them.

She looked positively dazzling in her beauty, and Olaf pinched Tekli's arm, whispering:

"She has come to charm us. Take care."

A slightly contemptuous smile curved the white mustache of the Circassian.

"We have no fears of the Tsigana; they are unclean. They eat dogs."

He echoed the common scorn of Moslems for the Gipsies, who seem to be an outcast race wherever they go.

But presently up came Sofia, smiling and arch, and caught Olaf by the arm.

"We belong to one household now," she said, "and we ought to be friends. You are looking for something."

"I am looking for Fedor Ivanovitch," he answered, "to show us over the palace."

"Nay, but I'll do that myself," she said archly. "Don't you think I'd make a good steward?"

He answered with an elaborate compliment which she rewarded by a pinch on the arm and then proceeded to lead him through all the rooms in the palace, which amounted to several hundred of all sorts.

The swordmaster, keen and observant, saw that in case of need, Prince Gavril could count on more than two hundred male servants who were lounging on each other's heels about the place, most of them having seemingly nothing to do.

He wondered to himself how it was that the prince having such means at his command, had allowed two men to cow him into admitting them into his palace.

Sofia, who noticed his abstraction, gayly asked him what was the cause.

"I was thinking," he said quietly, "that if your prince knew his own power I might not be here."

Her black eyes flashed on him in a glance of which he could hardly fathom the meaning.

"Methinks you are hardly prudent to tell me that," she retorted.

"Why not?"

"Because I might tell him."

"I do not fear that."

"And why not?"

"Because such eyes as yours could not look quietly on the cowardly murder of a brave man by these pigs of Russians."

Sofia tossed her head.

"Don't be too sure of that. I've seen many a man killed."

"Yes, by your own people; but not by a Russian and when the man has slept under the tents of the Romany."

The girl started violently, turned on him and addressed him a flood of words in a soft musical tongue, to which he replied in a few words, and from that moment her manner changed toward him.

Tekli Aga saw the change and wondered at it, but said nothing till he and his friend were again alone in their chamber when he asked:

"Is my brother a friend of these accursed Tsigani?"

His tone was grave and angry.

Olaf laughed as he answered:

"I am a friend to all the world, Tekli; and these Gipsies are in all places. I have met them in America, Africa, Asia and Europe, and they speak one language wherever they go. It is a good thing for any man to know it, for it will raise him up friends wherever he goes."

"And is this girl your friend now?"

The swordmaster shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? She has told me nothing yet; but she may before she has done. She came out to fascinate me and if I am not mistaken I have fascinated her."

The Circassian looked disgusted.

"Brother, we are both old men. Let us not shame our beards by boasting. How should a young girl like this be fascinated by a man who might be her father."

"My poor Tekli, you have only lived in one land; I in many. There is no end to the caprices of a woman, and they all are ready to love the man who can beat other men."

Tekli Aga made no answer. To him a Gipsy was an unclean creature and no amount of beauty could overcome his repugnance to Sofia.

Olaf went on:

"To-night I am satisfied that the people here will try to murder us."

"Why do they not try it now?"

"Because the prince is afraid of the long tongues of his servants since the freedom of the serfs has been granted. He cannot kill us in public without all the palace knowing it, and then some one would be sure to blab, and the Governor of the province would hear of it."

"And what then, brother?"

"Why then would come an inquiry and it must end in St. Petersburg at last."

"So you think that."

"That we are safe by daylight."

"And at night?"

"And at night we have not more than four men to dread. It would not do to trust the secret to more."

Tekli smiled like one well satisfied.

"Then we have nothing to fear. We can kill any four men they can muster."

Olaf shook his head.

"Not so fast. We cannot keep awake all the time."

"But we can lock our doors."

"Of course; but doors can be opened."

"Not without waking us."

"Suppose we are drugged as we were at the inn of Novogorod."

"We can prevent it, brother."

"How?"

"By eating eggs and drinking milk fresh from the cow drawn by ourselves."

"Very true, but we cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because to do so would showed that we have our suspicions of the people of this place."

"So we have—"

"But we must not show them."

"I don't see why."

"Because we have come on a certain quest. We want to find the stolen jewels."

"Well?"

"They have hidden them away."

"Again, what of it?"

"And we have no proof that they are here. In short, to find them, we must go in the confidence of some of these people. To do that we must show ourselves their friends. There are only two people here who know where the jewels are; the prince and the Gipsy girl. If I can make friends with her and get her to show me the jewels I feel safe. Till I have done that, we must watch every night."

Tekli Aga nodded gravely.

"I see, brother."

"The first thing," continued the swordmaster, "is to find whether our room is a safe one."

"How safe, brother?" asked the other, simply.

Olaf smiled.

"My innocent Tekli; St. Petersburg is not all the world and you do not know all the tricks yet. Heard you never of secret passages?"

Tekli nodded.

"They had one in the castle of my grandfather which the Russians bombarded. It was made to allow the chief access to his harem without letting the world know whither he had gone."

"Exactly. Probably this one, if one there be here, had a similar object. Let us explore."

They went slowly round the room, sounding the wall cautiously with their knuckles.

It was a large modern-looking room with a bright French paper in white and gold on the wall; the last place in the world where one would have suspected a secret passage.

None could be discovered in the wall.

"Nevertheless," observed Olaf, "one must be here, or they would not have put me in here; let us try the floor for traps."

All round the carpet they went and at last found under the bed, which they had moved to one side, a carefully concealed trap-door.

They could just see the junction of the carpet and tried to pull up the lid but there was no ring to lift it.

When they ran a knife into the carpet and lifted on that, they experienced such resistance as convinced them that the trap was hooked on the other side.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAPS AND SNARES.

As soon as the friends made the discovery of the trap-door a discussion ensued on the best steps to be taken to avoid danger.

They concluded they could do nothing but wait and be prepared, as soon as any one raised the trap, to annihilate him or them.

They pushed the bed back over the trap and saw that there was about three feet space under it, for the legs of the bedstead were very long and high.

Then they went out again into the palace and found the servants bustling out while the dinner table was being prepared.

The prince also made his appearance and treated them with perfect courtesy, as if they were old inmates of the house, and friends.

He proposed to Olaf that they should choose a fencing room and have a bout with the foils to give them an appetite for dinner.

The swordmaster consented, but made Tekli Aga come along with them, for he scented a trap in everything.

The prince wanted to catch him without his pistols, he divined.

Therefore when he took them off he laid them ostentatiously on a chair by Tekli Aga, and when the prince innocently offered to examine them interposed with the bland remark:

"Very sorry; but against my rules."

"Against your rules," echoed Gavril angrily. "Why, whose house is this?" "Your honorable mansion except this room. Wherever the swordmaster is, he is supreme." "And you mean I must obey you?" "Why else do you pay me? To teach you. I cannot teach if you will not obey orders. I let no one touch my pistols but myself and my assistant, Tekli Aga." His highness turned sulkily away and took up a foil.

"Come, let us see what you can do?" he said. "I will tell you what I can do," said Olaf smiling. "I can hit you every time I please, and call the thrust before I make it, defying you to parry."

The prince curled his lip. "Perhaps you think you can. You don't know that I learned to fence in Paris."

"French fencing is all humbug, prince. The French cannot fence against the Danes. I will show you. Take the foil so—now I will make one disengage and only one, and I will hit you on the right breast outside, defying you to parry tierce—see now—one! two! three! You are hit."

The prince swore angrily. "You can't do it again."

"Very good. Once more. Carte this time. One! two! three! You see. You are hit."

"I can do that myself," cried the prince.

"Very well, try it."

Clash! clash!

Away went the prince's foil into the corner under Olaf's parry.

"My little lamb," said the swordmaster in his most affectionate way. "Never think you know how to fence till you have taken some years of lessons. Have you an appetite yet? If not, we will try the English boxing for awhile."

"No, let us go to dinner."

The air of the prince had grown sullen again and he led the way to dinner with a gloomy look.

The servants brought round sweetmeats first in the Russian style.

Olaf watched his host carefully and refused to be helped till he had seen the prince eat.

Then he called for exactly the same dish which he never let go out of his sight.

"They cannot poison an old soldier so easily," he said to himself.

So the dinner went on.

The servants did not understand what was going on, but the furtive sullen looks of the prince showed that he knew he was being watched.

Once he tried to recommend some soup to Olaf, but the wary swordmaster said:

"I make it a rule to eat only what my host does. Anything else disagrees with me."

The prince bent his eyes on his plate and made no reply.

So the dinner progressed to its conclusion and when it was over the prince offered Olaf a cigar.

The swordmaster took it and put it in his pocket with a bow.

"Thanks, prince: but I never smoke for a period of five minutes after dinner, and in that period I always take a little walk in the garden under the trees."

The prince offered Tekli Aga a cigar and the Circassian imitated his comrade's example.

Then Olaf strolled off under the trees on the lawn and managed for an instant to get one of them between him and the prince.

In that instant he took one of his own cigars out and lit it just as the prince came up, saying:

"The five minutes are up, prince."

He noticed that the other wore an eager, hungry look on his face and seemed to be much pleased to find him smoking, so he turned to Tekli Aga.

"Light your cigar, Tekli," he said. "I'll give you a light."

He turned his back on the prince, and by a dextrous sleight of hand managed to change the Circassian's cigar for one of his own, putting the other away into his pocket.

Then they strolled away under the trees, and he noticed the prince watching them in the same eager way.

"Decidedly, there is some mischief in those cigars," he thought to himself.

They sat down on a bench and smoked away, till Olaf suddenly threw away his half-smoked cigar.

"It tastes bad," he said abruptly. "Where did you get it, prince?"

The prince turned deadly pale, but made shift to answer.

"Strange you do not like it. That is one of my very best and cost—"

"Cost is nothing; taste everything," retorted Olaf, sharply. "If it were not that your highness is above suspicion, I should say that cigar was poisoned."

"Poisoned; no, no!" cried the prince, eagerly. "See, I smoke the same kind."

"So I see," returned the swordmaster, coldly. Then he turned round and saw that they were out of earshot of the house.

"Prince Gavril," he said sternly, "what did you put in those cigars?"

"Nothing, so help me all the—"

"Do not swear," observed Olaf, coldly; "I am going to confute you. Look here."

He took out one of the cigars and divided it lengthwise with his knife.

The prince uttered a slight groan, which was drowned in the sneering laugh of the Dane, as he pulled out from the center of the cigar close to the mouth end, a small copper cartridge.

"A very pretty device," said Olaf, coolly, as he held it up, "and one never made in Russia, I'll swear. The cigar looks so innocent, one smokes and smokes away till the fire reaches the cartridge, and then—hey presto! in a moment no one knows what has become of the smoker. Prince, you are a clever man, but I have lived in Mexico, where murder is a trade. You must be much sharper yet to catch the old man."

Prince Gavril made no answer. The sweat poured over his pale face, but inasmuch as he saw that the swordmaster was only smiling, he judged the danger over and began to recover himself.

"Let us go to the house and have some music," he said placidly.

Olaf stared at him a moment, then gave him a slap on the shoulder, crying, with a ringing laugh:

"Decidedly, my little lamb, you are a genius. Come along."

They went to the house, where the prince, who seemed anxious to entertain and amuse them, sent for his singers and ordered a regular Russian concert, to which Olaf listened with much pleasure.

At last he professed himself sleepy and went to his room, followed by the silent but vigilant Tekli Aga.

They bolted the door, dragged the bed up against it, and then sat down to watch the trap-door.

There were several wax candles in the room, but Olaf put them all out, and left them in a row, while he laid some matches by him.

They were going to wait in the dark.

There were two large windows in the room, opening on the park, and it was a clear night so that they could see everything faintly.

Tekli Aga watched at the window, Olaf by the closed trap.

Both had their pistols in their belts, but each had his sword drawn.

"We will try cold steel," observed the Dane, grimly. "It never misses fire and it makes no noise."

They heard the house sink into silence, and presently Tekli Aga shrunk from the window and whispered:

"Two men are watching."

"To see if our lights are out. Good; they will be here soon. He dare not trust very many with the secret."

Tekli waited a moment; then looked out once more.

"They have gone," he said.

"Then they are coming here."

Tekli stole back to the trap; they moved the chairs out of the way, and both lay flat down on their faces near the trap.

Presently they heard noises under the floor; faint steps and whispering.

Both men drew back a little and crouched ready for a spring.

They were both on the inner side of the room so as to bring any person coming out of the trap between them and the window.

In another moment came the clink of iron on iron, and the carpet stirred. The people below were unhooking the trap-door.

Then it rose up slowly and a man's head emerged with his back to them and face to the window.

Before he could get any further Tekli Aga with the spring of a tiger had seized the edge of the trap and flung it back, while Olaf had seized the head by its long hair and had fairly yanked the unhappy Russian out of the trapway into the middle of the room howling with surprise and fear.

As for Tekli Aga, he dashed into the dark opening without the slightest hesitation and in another moment came the sound of a stifled struggle on a stairway below.

Olaf on his part found his Russian easy to manage. It was not necessary to use his sword save to hammer away with the pummel, and two blows of this were sufficient.

When the prowler lay senseless, the swordmaster called out to his friend Tekli:

"Do you want any help?"

"Yes," grunted the Circassian; "this man is heavy."

But there was no noise to show if the man were alive.

Olaf went down and felt his friend pulling at the leg of some man.

The body was down stairs.

He groped about, found the other leg and they pulled the whole body up.

When it was on the carpet they both felt tired.

The body was that of a man over six feet high and weighed from two to three hundred pounds.

Then said Tekli:

"Come, let us get a light."

"Is your man dead?" asked the Dane.

"Yes," was the cool answer, "I felt my dagger stop three times in flesh."

They lighted a wax candle and found on the floor the dead body of a huge Cossack whom they had noticed about the place during the day, a sulky, ferocious-looking brute.

The stunned man was Martin Petrovitch the prince's valet.

"Did your man fight?" asked Olaf, as he compared the enormous Cossack with the lithe, slender figure of Tekli Aga.

"Fight, yes," was the answer with a shade of contempt. "After the third stab, when it was too late. We have the battle over before these pigs know we've begun."

Here Martin Petrovitch groaned.

"Let us kill him too, brother," observed the Circassian coolly. "It saves so much trouble to kill a man dead."

Olaf shook his head.

"No, no. Do you remember I once told you I had never killed a man? That was thirty-five years ago. I have never done it since either, though I have knocked many men stiff in my time."

"What shall we do with him then?"

"Make him confess, as we did the sergeant at Novogorod."

"Very good."

Russia is a country where people are so used to being beaten and to beating others in turn that a proposal to torture a man into confession excites no notice.

Tekli Aga thought it the most natural thing in the world, and he dragged the poor Russian to the bedstead, tied his hands round the bedpost and looked round for sticks to beat him.

Presently Martin came to his senses and found Olaf and Tekli Aga looking at him, each with a riding whip in his hand.

He stared stupidly at them.

"How came you here?" asked Olaf.

"Most high-born one, I was asleep. Who brought me here?"

Olaf raised his whip.

"Tell us who brought you here yourself."

"I was asleep."

Both whips descended and kept up a sharp lashing for several minutes, till Martin roared out:

"Mercy, most high-born one, do not kill me. I am a poor orphan. It was Nikolai Mattiovitch brought me."

"And who ordered you to come?"

"No one, most high-born one, no one—oh mercy! yes, my master."

"What were you to do here?"

"To stab you in your sleep."

Martin seemed willing to make a clean breast of it now.

"And for what cause?"

"Because the prince said you were two *tchinnoviks* coming to spy on us and tell tales at St. Petersburg."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, most high-born one."

And another severe flogging could only make him reiterate his assertions, so that they desisted and believed him.

"Where does this passage lead to?"

"Into the park by one way, to his highness's chamber by another."

"Indeed, who holds the keys?"

"I have them all, most high-born one."

And he produced them when he was untied; led them through the passage, showed them how to get into the park, also how to fasten the door inside, and finally how to get into the prince's chamber.

They took him back to their own room and found out that the prince had told them, if they were successful, to take two horses from the stable and flee to the steppe, so as to free the palace from blame, and cause the murder to be attributed to ordinary robbery.

Olaf smiled when he heard this.

"Nay, he is a greater coward than any I ever saw before," he said. "He dare not even look on blood, and yet he aspires to be thought a dare-devil."

He and Tekli formed their plan very quickly, and Martin, who feared his lord's vengeance, fell in with it at once.

It was to keep themselves hid for awhile and to send Martin away, so as to make the prince believe his plan had succeeded.

They found from him that the whole house was asleep and likely to stay so, while the prince could not get into the secret passage himself.

Therefore they went down with Martin to the stables, saddled their own horses, and all three rode away to the Irtish, crossed it, and before dawn were far away on the steppe, heading for the *doul* or camp of a friend of the Russian's, whose name was Nazar.

CHAPTER X.

RUSSIAN CONSCIENCE.

PRINCE GAVRIL NESSELDORF was up betimes next day and took his breakfast alone with the Gipsy girl.

Both avoided looking at each other and the prince particularly seemed to be uneasy, for he

started frequently and appeared to expect something, from the way he kept looking at the door.

He had hardly finished his breakfast, when his steward, Fedor Ivanovitch, came to him, trembling in fear of his master's anger and reported that Martin Petrovitch and Nikolai Mattiovitch had absconded with two of the best horses in the stable, and, what was worse, had taken away the horses of the two strange gentlemen.

Much to his surprise the prince received the news very coolly.

"I expected it, Fedor," he said. "It all comes of the Czar's proclamation. They think, now they are no longer serfs that they can do anything. Let them go."

"But will not your nobility have them chased?" inquired Fedor, aghast. "There is Bi Tabouk the Kirghiz, whose aoul is within sight from the towers and we can have the villains caught."

"Let them go, Fedor. Please God we have plenty of horses left and as for the strangers we can give them others."

Fedor, who had expected an explosion in the usual Russian fashion, with a possible taste of stick for his own back, was very grateful to get off and went away.

When he had gone the prince muttered:

"They have done the work, Sofia. I hope you are happy now. I have broken all the laws of my house and murdered a guest."

"A guest who forced himself in," she retorted. "Now I can wear the jewels again."

In fact within ten minutes after, this beautiful creature, without a soul so far as conscience was concerned, was dancing around the house, singing as gayly as a lark, while Gavril Nessel-dorf with a gloomy face was pacing up and down the lawn of the house occasionally glancing up at the windows of the state bedroom.

None of his servants ventured to go near the room which they judged to contain his guests and so the day passed away, and the next and the next, till on the fourth day Fedor ventured to say:

"May it please your nobility, the two men who were in the state bedroom must have run away with Martin for we have listened at the door and there has been no sound there for three days."

The prince laughed in a hard disagreeable way as he replied:

"Let them go too. I thought they were only impostors. They have run away with my serfs; but we have more."

"But shall the room be left empty?" the steward ventured to ask.

"Yes, fool. Can I not do as I will with my own house?"

And Fedor went away abashed.

That night Sofia came to her lover.

"Come, we must go in there and get out the bodies or they will betray us. It is growing hot weather."

He turned ghastly pale.

"Go in there? Never! I dare not."

She curled her lip.

"Have you no men on whom you can depend? I will take them in. You are safe from arrest for a long time now."

He shuddered for he was a Russian to the backbone, bred up in all kinds of weird superstitions and he had lately left off hard drinking, so that his nerves were in a state of tension that made him unusually timid.

"There is no one we can trust but the Tartars," he said.

"Then send for them."

He sent Fedor off to the nearest aoul of the wandering Kirghiz, for it had been the policy of his house for several generations to make friends with the simple nomads who all loved the Nessel-dorfs and would fight for them to the death.

Bi Tabouk, a Kirghiz chief, and four short, square-built Tartars came riding up to the house next day.

Bi Tabouk wore an owl's feather in his turban. It was a privilege he had, in common with a few other families of the steppe, in honor of his descent from Jengis Khan.

They came at nightfall, and were received with the most distinguished courtesy by the prince, who entertained them well and sent all his household to bed early.

Then he told them what was needed of them. It was to go to the state bedroom in the dead of night, force open the door if it were bolted, bring out two dead bodies and throw them in the Irtysh.

Bi Tabouk winked and grinned.

"You Russians are queer people. Why could not your own men do this? I suppose you are afraid of the police."

However, he consented readily.

"Come and show us the place," he said.

In the middle of the night the pale-faced prince took them to the door, gave them a key, told them to go in, and then—ran away, looking over his shoulder.

Bi Tabouk grinned again.

"He must be afraid of the devil," he said to his mates.

Then they set their shoulders to the door,

after unlocking it, for it seemed to be bolted on the inside.

Something resisted them, and they could not burst it open at once, but after a while they shoved it far enough over to show a big bedstead against it, and they got in, when a terrible odor assailed them.

"The man is dead, sure enough," said Bi Tabouk, with a grunt.

They shoved the bed away, and found by the light of a lantern a dead body, from which came the stench.

"We must get a bag," quoth Bi Tabouk.

They went down-stairs and got a sack from the kitchen, into which they put the body and hauled it away.

They could see nothing of the prince. He had fled to his own room, the prey of a superstitious heart, and would not come forth.

They took out the body and flung it into the river, and then came back to the house.

The prince heard them and came out this time to meet them.

He was white as a sheet; his teeth were chattering as with an ague fit, and he could hardly command his voice.

He made shift to whisper:

"Are they gone?"

"Gone? Yes, all the way to Tobolsk, if the fishes don't get it first."

"Thank God!"

Then a girl, who had been hiding in the dark behind him, came out and dazzled the simple Kirghiz with her wonderful beauty as she said to them:

"You are brave men. I love you all. You shall have all you can drink."

On her bosom at the end of a diamond necklace hung a grand flashing jewel set in gold, which made Bi Tabouk's eyes blink.

He looked at it, and said admiringly:

"Ah, what a grand stone. Nadir Shah had never so good a one. It is worth the lives of ten men, and you ought to belong to an emperor."

The girl laughed shrilly.

"It has cost the lives of two already, and I don't care for emperors. I only love brave men wherever they are."

She looked at Bi Tabouk in a way that made the Tartar's eyes glow, when the prince said, peevishly:

"Sofia, I wish you would leave those men alone."

She laughed in her reckless manner, and put her arms round his neck before the Tartar.

"You are my little Gavrilka," she cried kissing him. "I am sure of your love, but I want every one to adore me."

"The Tartar turned away with a slight haughty gesture, and said something in his own language to his men."

The prince understood it and turned as red as fire, though he pretended not to hear it.

Bi Tabouk had said:

"She makes a fool of him, like the tigress that makes the tigers fight for her."

In truth there was something in the lithe, evil beauty of the girl that resembled that of the tigress very much.

But Bi Tabouk had done his work and the prince gave him a purse full of gold over which the eyes of the Kirghiz gloated like fireballs, and then he and his men rode away into the darkness; forded the Irtysh at a sand-bar and returned to their aoul.

Meantime Sofia the Gipsy, full of her devil's humor, was teasing her slave to the utmost of her capacity.

As long as she had thought him a marvel of audacity and likely to become notorious as the robber of the crown jewels who had defied pursuit, the girl had loved him; but the advent of Olaf and the sudden revelation of Gavril's cowardice had turned all her love into contempt.

The fickle, vicious Gipsy would have gone over to Olaf, jewels and all, so much did she adore courage were it not that she had feared he would take the jewels and leave her alone in disdain.

Failing his love she had been willing to see him brushed out of her path as the only man who had cowed Gavril, so that she might con-call time to be happy.

Now she believed him dead, and was quite disposed to be faithful to "Gavrilka" as she him, till all his money was gone.

She had only made eyes at Bi Tabouk to torment her lover for it was her instinct to set men by ears about her fair self whenever she could, like a tigress with the tigers of the steppe.

"Come, Gavrilka, now let us go and see how they did the business," she said, and with that she boldly led the way to what had been the chamber of death followed by the prince, shaking all over, but still drawn by horrible curiosity. They looked in and saw the bed by the door, the blackened pool on the carpet all dried in; smelt the remains of the foul odor and hurried out.

"They must have expected to be attacked, Gavrilka," she remarked in a thoughtful tone. "Why?"

"Because they had moved the bed to the

door. They did not know anything about the passage and trap door."

"So it seems."

His tone was sullen, as if he did not want to speak much.

"I wonder whether they struggled much," he said in a low tone after a pause of musing.

"Of course not."

"Why not?"

"Did you not notice those men? They were made like my people and the leopard. If they got a chance to struggle at all, your Martin Petrovitch would have been like a baby in the hands of either of them. No, Gavrilka, they were killed in their sleep in the bed."

He started.

"In the bed. Then the sheets—"

"Never mind the sheets. They were killed for their money and the murderers have fled to the steppe. Let Fedor find it out."

And sure enough next morning came the honest steward with his eyes bulging out of his head to announce that he had found the door of the state chamber open, the bed empty and a dried pool of blood on the floor by the trap-door of the secret passage.

The prince pretended to be much excited by the news and went up to the room followed by Sofia and all the servants.

A glance at the bed told him that it had not been occupied since it was made. There was not a stain on the sheets.

All was confined to one spot on the floor by the trap.

He tried to raise this and failed; it was hooked fast.

He looked at Sofia and they sent away the servants. Both realized that something was wrong.

As soon as they were alone she began:

"Gavrilka, they were not killed. They were waiting for your men and have killed them instead."

"How do you know?" he asked, quaking.

"I know those men. If they were not in bed they were watching. If they were watching they killed their opponents."

"Then what made them go away?" he asked.

"To deceive us. But they have reckoned too soon. They might fool you, Gavrilka, but not a Romany girl."

And she burst into a torrent of her soft native language in her excitement.

"To think," she cried at last in Russian, "that they should be in our power at last and that I hold them in the hollow of my hand."

Prince Gavril stared amazedly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have them now. They are out of the house and if they try to come back it will be by the secret passage. We will have men waiting for them at each entrance to avenge the murder of our men. You see! We have them! They will only dare to come at night."

The prince shook his head.

"How do you know that?"

"Because they mean to play ghost upon us. I know, Gavrilka. You will see."

She hurried away to her own room and in a moment more came a terrible shriek which curdled the poor prince's blood.

"Gavril! Gavrilka! Come here! Quick! They are gone, gone, gone."

He ran in, followed by a crowd of servants with all sorts of weapons and found her standing before the glass, tearing her hair and shrieking.

"What has happened?" he asked excitedly.

"They were here! He was here!" she panted.

"Who?"

"The swordmaster!"

The prince uttered a groan.

"He was standing here as I came in and strode toward me. He dared to lay his hands on me and took the jewels. And now he has gone. Gavril, if you are a man, if you are not a coward meaner than the dog of the streets, call your men and kill him, or I will run after him and leave you forever."

She looked like a beautiful maniac and the prince was carried away by her flood of words as by a whirlwind.

"Which way did he go?" he asked.

"Into the secret passage."

"Sound the bell, arm the people and break in the door," he cried.

The girl's threat to leave him had turned him for the nonce into a man of energy.

In a few minutes the great bell of the palace was clanging away, and the serfs to the number of a hundred and fifty at least were battering away at the trap-door at one end and the panel at the other of the secret passage.

Down went both doors in a trice and into the darkness rushed the madly excited Russians, reckless of any thing. They had only, as it turned out, forgotten the exit into the park; and out of this leaped the swordmaster and Tekli Aga in the hottest of the disturbance and ran into the park.

"Now, brother," observed the Circassian; "they will not be frightened off any more. We have the jewels, and we must fight or run for it."

The swordmaster looked back.

"I wish we had our horses here. We could run gracefully then; but this running on foot is hot work and bad work."

They had left their horses a mile off at the edge of the park, and had stolen in while it was yet night into the secret passage.

They had heard the comments of the servants and Olaf had gone straight to the prince's room in the hopes of surprising Sofia.

He had done so with the jewels on her, and quite regardless of her beauty, had taken them from her and put them in his pocket, then turned and vanished in the secret passage.

"Yes, we have got the jewels," he said, and the next question is, how to get them back to St. Petersburg without leaving our own bones on the road."

CHAPTER XI.

A RUSSIAN MOB.

EVEN as the swordmaster spoke he saw the whole tribe of dependents on Nesseldorf come pouring out of the passage, armed with axes, scythes, pitchforks, guns and every sort of weapon found in those regions.

"Tekli," he said, decidedly, "we must run."

And sure enough, in another moment, the dignified and courtly Olaf, who had never before turned his back to a foe, was running at a sharp pace through the park, followed by a mob of infuriated Russian peasants, who howled like wolves for his blood.

And as a Russian peasant is a stupid being at his best and slow to rouse, when he is at last fully awaked to fury, his rage is like that of a wild bull.

"Death to the spy! Death to the wizard!" they yelled, for the prince and Sofia knew well how to excite their superstitious hatred.

Olaf and the Circassian had several hundred feet the start; but both were men past fifty, and used to horseback exercise more than to running.

Therefore it was not long before the leading peasants, who were active youngsters, began to close up near them.

Then the guns began to go off.

But Russian peasants are not very good marksmen at best, not being trusted much with guns.

Tekli Aga laughed as he heard three or four bullets go singing overhead.

"We will try a shot presently," he said.

The firing very soon ceased. In fact there were not fifty guns in the crowd and of these not twenty were loaded, while of those which had loads, nine-tenths had had them in for several years.

The only danger for our two friends lay in the closing in of such a numerous crowd, reckless of wounds or death.

Presently Tekli Aga, who had been trotting along at an easy pace, turned round by a tree, steadied his pistol over his elbow, and fired four deliberate shots, each dropping one of his pursuers. Then he turned again and trotted on.

But the momentary halt had enabled the other pursuers to close up within fifty feet, and their yells of rage were wilder than ever.

Plainly the loss only angered them.

But by this time they were near the low stone wall of the park, outside of which their horses were standing; and Olaf, who, had not stopped to fire, climbed wearily over it and sunk down on the other side, nearly exhausted.

He could fight as well as ever, but a run across country took the breath from him.

But his head was as clear and cool as ever, as he lay over on the park wall with both pistols in front of him, resting on the loose stones.

And just as Tekli Aga came up, the old swordmaster opened fire from two revolvers, taking aim with every shot and sending the Russians down like nine-pins in an alley. Tekli Aga climbed over and joined him, and their fierce and rapid fire frightened the crowd, to whom revolvers were mysteries.

They halted and began to cluster together; and, had our friends had only a few more charges all might have been well.

But they had only twenty shots, and twenty shots will not last forever.

And, as soon as they stopped shooting, the peasants took courage again, and came on.

"To the horses!" cried Olaf and they ran to their beasts, untied them hurriedly and climbed on, just as the foremost men came howling over the park wall, with their scythes and axes.

Away went the horses, snorting with fear, followed by a volley of stones, and Olaf found himself struck in the back. He turned round in the saddle and shouted to Tekli Aga, as if with rage:

"Let us go back and chastise these dogs. I can take a hundred of them on a good horse."

The wild dare-devil of a Circassian nodded his head, and the two veterans, hot-headed as boys, wheeled round their horses, drew their swords, and rode at the mob of peasants.

But, for once in his life, Olaf, the swordmaster, had made a mistake in despising the Russian peasant in a fight. These men were worked up to a pitch of desperate fury, and closed in on the two horsemen with blows of their long scythes and pole-axes, careless of whether they were struck in return.

In the midst of them all, raging on a gray horse, was Prince Gavril Nesseldorf, and, flying to and fro on her bay pony, like a beautiful demon, was Sofia, the Gipsy, screaming out maledictions.

For a few moments there was a regular pandemonium of noise, and then Olaf found himself compelled to flee from the terrible scythe blades, which threatened every moment to hamstring his horse.

As he galloped away he heard a wild yell of triumph, and, looking round, saw that Tekli Aga was down.

In a moment all his generous spirit was up in arms to save his friend, who had stuck by him so long.

He wheeled his horse and rushed at the prince, as his only chance.

Gavril saw him coming, and was so much nerved up by the presence of numbers that he undertook to meet Olaf.

In a moment his blade was beaten out of his hand, and he himself was lying on the pommel of the swordmaster's saddle, while Olaf roared:

"Throw down your arms, or I'll kill your master like a chicken!"

In another moment there was a cry of fear; and the lately savage Russians, quelled by the danger to the lord they had been taught from childhood to revere, actually threw down their arms.

Olaf saw his advantage, and would have used it, but for the fact that the wild Gipsy girl, with all the fearless desperation of her nature came galloping up to him at that very moment, and clung to his right arm with such tenacity that she could not be shaken off, screaming:

"Down with them. Kill him!"

It was all done in an instant, and the next Olaf had dropped the prince, while the Russians were scrambling for their arms. But he had caught the Gipsy to the front of his saddle, galloping off with her. He was compelled to use all his strength and fairly to crush her in his arms to do this, for she fought like a tigress; but as soon as they were fairly away, she suddenly ceased to struggle and lay passive, as if she were about to faint, which was the case.

But Olaf had known what he was about when he carried off the beautiful demon.

He knew the utter infatuation of the prince for her, and that he would move heaven and earth to get her back.

As soon as she was quiet he wheeled his horse and rode back to within hailing distance, when he halted.

He saw the prince and his followers in a group, clustered together, and called out:

"If you hurt my friend I will kill the girl."

The prince ran out, waving his arms wildly.

"Don't hurt her, and I will do anything you wish, anything."

"Put my friend on a horse and send him back to me then," cried Olaf.

There was a short discussion, and then the prince called out:

"He is hurt! He cannot ride!"

"Then by the great roost of St. James," cried Olaf fiercely, "she pays for it. You have seen only one side of me hitherto, my friend. Now you shall see the other. I am going, and in three days I shall be here with a regiment and a battery at my back. If you harm Tekli Aga, I'll hang you from your own flagstaff. Do you hear me?"

The prince made no answer, and at that moment the crack of a rifle and the whiz of a bullet told Olaf that treachery was intended.

The bullet whizzed past his horse's tail, and he recognized that they were trying to cripple his mount in order to take himself a prisoner.

As soon as he saw this he wheeled his animal and went away at full speed.

He had resolved to make for Tobolsk at once as he could not trust any of the lesser Russian officials.

Tobolsk was the residence of the Governor of Western Siberia. From him, backed by the order of the Czar, he could get all the troops he wanted, go back and rescue his friend.

He had the jewels safe; but Olaf was not the man to go back and leave his faithful and devoted friend, Tekli Aga, to suffer.

"He and I started from St. Petersburg together," he said to himself, "and we will go back together."

Thus thinking he rode away down the Irtysh river, over the broad lands of the Nesseldorf estate, heading north.

Sofia the Gipsy did not, after her first hard struggle, offer any more resistance.

She lay still in his arms, and listened to the fierce way in which he spoke to Gavril.

When he finally galloped away, she sat up and put her arms round his waist.

"Olaf," she presently said, as they rode along. "You are a man, and Gavril is only a boy. I love you. Why should we not flee to the steppe? I love a brave man."

"Be silent," he said, harshly.

She obeyed with touching humility, and in a moment more began to cry.

But he was proof against her tears also.

The fact was that Olaf, in knocking about the world for fifty-four years, had seen a good deal of the sex, and had imbibed a great contempt

for such specimens of it as the frail and fickle Sofia.

When she saw that he scorned her tears, she became silent and meek, but her heart was burning for revenge, while she felt that she admired this disdainful old warrior more and more every minute.

Finally she saw her chance.

They heard a faint sound behind them, and she, looking over his shoulder, saw that they were being pursued by a number of Kirghiz Tartars, very seldom seen on that side of the Irtysh.

"Olaf," she whispered, "they are after us. I can save you, if you wish."

He looked round over his shoulder and counted twenty three mounted men on the trail.

"Thank you," he said, dryly. "I can save myself from those men, I think. Will you dismount now? I don't want you any more, till I've disposed of those fellows."

"No," she said firmly. "I will serve as a shield to you, Olaf. I can stop a bullet."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I know the reason. Like all women, you are crazy after jewels, and you want to get back those that I have in my pocket. But you cannot do it. Please dismount."

"I will not," she said firmly. "I tell you I love you, and if you will not have me, I will make you repent it."

"Very well," he said coolly. "Stick to your post then, if you like: but I want to load my pistols."

It is an operation of some time and patience to load an old-fashioned Colt revolver, and in those days copper cartridges were little used; but the swordmaster finally accomplished his task and then rode slowly on, with the girl in front of him.

Presently the Tartars came up.

At their head was Bi Tabouk, and Sofia knew him and called out gayly to him:

"Bi Tabouk, what do you want? Don't come any further."

Bi Tabouk held up his hand with the palm outward—the signal of amity.

"I want to speak to the white chief," he said.

"Keep where you are then," cried Olaf cocking his pistol. "I can kill the whole twenty of you."

The Tartars halted and Bi Tabouk replied.

"My lord the prince sends me to you, most high-born one, to say that he will take the best care of your friend, if you will only give back to him the lady."

It was Sofia who answered with a laugh.

"Go back, Bi Tabouk, and tell the prince I am tired of living with boys and cowards. I am going to stay with the swordmaster."

CHAPTER XII.

TOBOLSK.

THE city of Tobolsk is a handsome place, for western Siberia is a country of mines of gold, malachite, and all sorts of precious stones, and where there is money there are handsome towns.

Close to the citadel tower the gloomy gray walls of the convict prison, and every day and all day long gangs of men can be seen going through the streets to work, escorted by soldiers with loaded muskets.

In the winter these men wear short fur coats and sheepskin boots and caps, over a dress of brown and gray. Sometimes the jacket is gray with brown sleeves. The trousers have one leg gray, the other brown. All these men have their heads shaven. Some have it bare on one side only, others have the front bare; but all are shaven in some grotesque way.

In summer they go about in dirty white clothes, for the sun is very hot.

But they always go in troops, and as they walk you hear the clank of iron. It is the sound of their fetters worn under the loose clothes, but none the less real. They never take them off, night or day: in fact they are riveted on. For these men are the convicts, and Siberia is full of them.

Many are branded on the face with some Russian letter. These are the men doomed to perpetual exile. They may have ten, twenty, thirty years of hard labor in chains to undergo, and at the end of that time they must never leave Siberia. They are doomed to remain among criminals all the rest of their lives, be they long or short.

In those gloomy processions one may see men of all kinds. The majority are of the peasant or shopkeeper class, and there are but few gentlemen among them.

There are murderers, parricides, fratricides, infanticides among them, thieves, counterfeiters, deserters, political prisoners; men of a hundred crimes; men of misfortune merely.

No matter what they have done, they are now sunk in a common lot of woe, convicts.

Sentenced to associate with the vilest of the vile, no matter how slight their crime, they are shut into a living tomb, and never, for one moment, left alone.

That is said to be the hardest trial of all to the political prisoners, who are generally men of education and refinement. They are never alone.

At night they are shut into the sleeping room with hundreds of thieves and murderers; three feet of space on a wooden shelf being their only privilege.

By day they go to work in gangs, and on no pretext can they leave the gang without the presence of a guard.

Men who come out of Siberia alive are frequently found to hate society. No wonder, when their prison life makes it one long torture.

One might suppose that the terrible severity of Siberian prison life and the vile class of men that compose the majority of the convicts would breed in the people at large a horror of the place and the men; but this is not a fact.

The severity, frequently disproportioned to the offense, reacts on the people; and they call the convicts only "the unhappy ones."

As the gangs of fettered men file by to their work, the Siberians stop in the streets to look, and generally they cross themselves and mutter "God favor the unhappy ones!" Then a convict runs out, cap in hand, and the Siberian puts some money in the cap, and goes his way. And the "unhappy ones" go to their work, knowing that they have friends.

Yet Siberia is a lovely country, if one could live aright in it.

As a Russian author tells us, the climate is excellent; there are many rich merchants and hospitable foreigners in the towns; the girls bloom like roses; wild ducks and game birds of all kinds fly about in the streets; the soil is wonderfully rich; in short it is a blessed country; but the trouble is how to enjoy it, when the curse of penal servitude is over it all.

But the presence of the convicts, and especially of the "men under restraint," who have served their terms, but are exiled forever, has given rise to a strange undercurrent of society, which in our day has blossomed forth into the wild excesses of Nihilism.

"Humanitarianism," as it was at first called, had its rise in the horrible severity of Siberian prison life. When men were used to seeing fellow-creatures, for simple thefts, for homicides in the heat of passion, or for the mere possession of a book breathing the doctrines of republicanism, doomed to twenty years of servitude in chains and three thousand blows of the stick, their natures revolted at the notion of such law being justice.

Then they imbibed the simple notions:—"All this is wrong; the Czar; the nobles; the clergy; all are all wrong. It is a cursed system; and we, who are cowards and fools, we suffer it. These unhappy ones were braver than we. They revolted against the injustice, and the Czar takes revenge. Some day we shall be up and he down. In the meantime these unhappy ones are our brothers, and entitled to honor as martyrs."

This was and is the main creed of the Russian humanitarian or nihilist; a creed born of centuries of cruelty and wrong, a creed that bears bloody fruit to-day.

But we did not set out in this story to preach a sermon about nihilism, only to give a reasonably faithful portrait of Russian life in 1861, and no such would be complete without the first mutterings of the then despised visionaries, the nihilists.

Somewhere about a week after the final escape of Olaf, the swordmaster, from the mob of Prince Gavril's followers, a Tartar messenger, on a small Kirghiz horse, with a huge mane and tail, rode into the city of Tobolsk and asked for the shop of Issai Formitch, the jeweler.

Issai Formitch was a little wizened Jew, an ex-convict, who exercised the trades of jeweler and pawnbroker. He was timid to excess, as harmless as a rabbit, and it was a standing wonder how such an insignificant-looking creature could ever have done anything bold enough to deserve Siberia.

Yet, insignificant as he looked, Issai Formitch was no fool, and had once been the head and front of a desperate gang of counterfeiters. During his twenty years in prison he had behaved so well and displayed such a genius for gathering money together that when he was discharged he had accumulated enough funds to open a little shop for the sale and purchase of all sorts of jewelry, and his business speedily became flourishing.

Issai Formitch was a popular man with convicts and Siberians alike, spite of his calling as a money-lender, on account of his winning and plausible address. He would offer a peasant ten cents for an article worth five dollars with so many excuses about his own poverty that the man felt grateful for a personal favor when he finally received twenty-five cents. His selling was conducted with the same obliging manner, and he never offended any one.

And he was a good keeper of secrets.

Consequently, there was generally a crowd in Issai Formitch's shop during the day, and at nights, after the shutters were up, people used to come there by ones and twos to hold long and mysterious conferences down in the cellar.

The only people never found in Issai's store by day were the officers of the garrison. The common soldiers were frequent visitors.

The Tartar of whom we have spoken was a short, square man, with a huge fur cap like a turban, and he wore an owl's feather in it.

He was dressed in a pink calico shirt worn outside black velvet *sharavary*, or loose trousers, which were thrust into yellow leather boots with inordinately high heels, and in the striped silk sash round his waist he had a short curved sword thrust.

Beyond this he bore no weapon except a short whip.

This Tartar came into Issai's shop and made a curious sign without speaking a word.

Making a hook of one forefinger, he brought it down over his nose with a sniff, and then stamped his left foot.

Issai was examining a diamond by the light that came from a hole in the shutter—for the shop was very dark—and he looked over his silver-rimmed spectacles at the Tartar as if surprised, asking:

"What, are you too—"

"Chains and whips," was the response, in very good Russian.

"Yes," replied Issai, "they are good for—"

"Slaves," answered the other, in a low tone.

Then Issai put away his diamond, and the following conversation took place, with frequent furtive glances at the door as if fearing the coming of some eavesdropper:

"Slaves are men."

"Slaves are cowards."

"Cowards live softly."

"Brave men die hard."

"What do you believe?"

"Nothing I see."

"What do you hear?"

"Nothing but lies."

"Who is the Czar?"

"The man doomed."

"Doomed to what?"

"To punishment."

"Who shall punish him?"

"His own."

"When?"

"When the time comes."

"Who shall take his place?"

"No one."

"Why not?"

"Because the people need none."

"Who are the happy ones?"

"The dead."

"Why?"

"Because they have no kings in the grave."

"Who are the unhappy ones?"

"The rich and noble."

"Why?"

"Because their time is coming."

"When?"

"When the people wake up."

"Who will wake them?"

"No one."

"What will wake them?"

"Despair."

"What is despair?"

"Hope."

"What is hope?"

"The happiness of fools."

"Then despair is folly?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because despair is hope against hope."

"Who is a great man?"

"He who kills a tyrant."

"Who is a base man?"

"He who obeys a tyrant willingly."

"What is the one thing needed in Russia?"

"Destruction."

"Why?"

"Because all is bad to the heart."

Issai ceased his singular catechism of the Tartar and held out his left hand.

The Tartar imitated the example, but both kept their hands clenched.

They touched knuckles three times and Issai said frankly:

"It is enough. I could hardly believe you were one of us; for why should one of your freemen of the steppe have any sympathy with us who suffer?"

The Tartar shook his head gravely.

"You think we on the steppes are free. No, my brother. The *bad one* has a long arm, and he reaches down into our souls and plucks up what he needs, when he needs it. We, too, have cause to dread the sight of a green coat and brass buttons."

Issai nodded.

"Who initiated you?"

"A circle was formed in our soul, a year ago, and Prince Gavril Nesseldorf is one of our converts. The Black Father of Warsaw was our first Supreme Head."

Issai looked much surprised.

"You say Prince Nesseldorf is a convert? Are you sure of that?"

"I gave him the words myself, brother."

"And why did he not join a circle of his own land?"

"Because we took him at a time of grief."

"What do you mean?"

"That he had lost all that made life dear to him and that, without us, he is lost."

Issai glanced round the shop in a very apprehensive way.

"Whisper. We are in Tobolsk? and walls may have ears and tongues."

The Tartar came close and the rest of the conversation took place in whisper.

"He stole the jewels."

"What—from the crown?"

"Yes; how do you know?"

"The news came in with the last batch of prisoners from the west."

"Yes. Do the *bad ones* know it?"

The "bad ones," in nihilist slang, are the soldiers and civil officers of the Czar.

"Not yet."

"Well, he has lost them."

"How?"

"To a devil of a Dane, paid by the *bad one*."

"We knew the Dane was after him."

"He has found him; taken the jewels and is coming here."

"When?"

"Before to-morrow. I killed three horses to pass him. He has with him a woman."

"Well?"

"And the woman is the cause of our convert. The prince is mad for her."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"Get back the jewels and the woman."

"And then?"

"And then we can command all the wealth of the Nesseldorfs."

"But suppose he turns traitor?"

"He will not. I know him."

"Is he true to his word?"

"No; but he is a coward, and we have him so he dare not go back. I have sent word to the Black Father of Moscow, and he sent me this."

The Tartar glanced suspiciously round the shop and showed the other a small piece of red cord, which he wore round his wrist under his sleeve.

Issai started.

"What! is the Black Father so near as that? You know the meaning of that too? Why that is in the—"

"Nineteenth circle—yes, brother. It pledges the whole power of—"

"Of Nobody and all his clan to follow you," said Issai respectfully. "Command me as you wish."

The Tartar pulled back his sleeve over the red cord.

The man will enter Tobolsk and go to the Governor's house as soon as he rides in. He must be stopped."

"He shall be stopped. Give me his picture. Tell me how we shall know him."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN A TRAP.

THE sun takes a long time to himself before he sets in summer in the latitude of Tobolsk, and he rises betimes; so that a very few hours are allotted to night.

At midnight the sky is red from the north-west to the north-east, marking where the twilight is both ending and beginning; and it was at just this interesting period of the midsummer night that Olaf the Dane, with Sofia still clinging to the saddle behind him, came riding toward the city of Tobolsk, and uttered a sigh of relief.

"Thank God, we are there at last."

For nearly a week he had been on the road, and every day had had its annoyances and delays. In the first place he could not get rid of the Gipsy girl. She stuck to him like a leech. He had tried to induce her to go back once or twice; for he did not care for her company, after she had served his purpose in frightening Prince Gavril from hurting Tekli Aga. He knew that, after the first heat of passion was over, the prince would hesitate at harming the Circassian, dreading the sure vengeance that would come as soon as Olaf should report at Tobolsk.

Sofia was useful to stop the chase; but after that he would have been glad to drop her. But she would not be dropped.

The artful Gipsy was determined to get back, by fair means or foul, the jewels which Gavril Nesseldorf had stolen from the crown with so much adroitness, and which Olaf had regained with so much impudence.

When he offered to leave her she cried and plead, till, for very shame, he was obliged to take her up again; and, till they arrived at Tobolsk, they had come across no towns where he could decently leave a lone woman.

Therefore, when he saw the domes and steeples of Tobolsk, Olaf gave devout thanks aloud.

Sofia noticed the words.

"Why do you thank God so?"

"Because we are in Tobolsk."

"I on the contrary, am sorry."

"Why?"

"Because on the journey we were alone, and it is heaven to be alone with the man I love."

Olaf shrugged his shoulders and rode on.

"We shall meet some nuns, presently, I hope," he observed at last.

"Why nuns?"

"They will be safe people to leave you with."

"Indeed I will not go to them."

"But you must."

"But I won't."

"You cannot stay with me forever, Sofia."

"Why not?"

"Because I have a wife and children in America."

The Gipsy laughed.

"What of that? Let them stay there."

"But I must go back to them."

"Why? What made you come to Russia?"

"To seek my fortune again."

"Then why not stay here?"

"Because I must bring them back."

"I don't see why?"

"Well, perhaps not. But we Danes have a saying you might not like."

"What is that?"

"That one wife is worth fifty women who are not wives. I promised to come back for my people or send for them, as soon as I was fairly settled."

Sofia looked up at his hard resolute face, and her lips writhed into a bitter smile.

"And I suppose when she comes I must go?"

"Of course you must," he answered dryly.

"And yet what has she done for you, compared to what I have?" pursued the Gipsy.

"That is a question I don't care to discuss."

Sofia's eyes flashed fire.

"Has she saved your life as I did?"

"You? When did you save my life? You only tried to take it."

The girl burst into tears and sobbed:

"I saved you from the mob by lying quiet in your arms when I might have screamed for help. I have saved you from more than you think since then, and if I leave you now, you will never reach St. Petersburg."

He laughed scornfully.

"Why you foolish girl, I have only kept you with me out of pity, and because I did not want to let you starve in the wilderness. Now I am tired of you. I know what you want. It is to get back those jewels which I have hidden. I defy you to find them. Now, the sooner you get off my horse the better."

They were already within the suburbs.

Sofia made a last effort.

"Olaf, if you will take me with you, I will be your slave. You do not know into what many dangers you are running without me."

"All the same," he said dryly, "you will do well to get off here. Your people are everywhere, and we can part friends."

Without another word the girl sprung down from the horse.

Then she stood at the roadside and said, as she watched him ride off:

"Before another sunset, you will be sorry."

Olaf rode into the city just as the eastern sky was glowing with crimson, and heard the bell of the convict prison clanging the signal of waking to work.

A few people were in the streets, and he began to think of asking his way.

As he slackened his pace in doubt he saw an old man, small and wizened, with a long gray beard, bowing before his horse.

Whence the old man had sprung he knew not, but he was certainly bowing to him.

"God be with you, father," he said.

"The peace of our father Abraham with you, my son," responded the other. "You are far from your own home and you seek a man you will not find."

"What do you mean?" asked the Dane, amazed.

"That you have come here from the other side of the earth, and that you seek General Boris Goryantcheff, who has gone out on a tour of inspection and is far away."

"But if the Governor is absent, there is some lesser officer in his place," said Olaf.

With all the suspicion of an old traveler he scented a plot in the air.

"Surely there is, and I am going to his house," answered the old Jew.

"But how knew you I was a stranger?" the swordmaster pursued.

"We have known for weeks that Count Olaf Svenson, a Dane, had been sent by the Czar to recover the jewels stolen by Prince Gavril Nesseldorf. The Governor left word for me to meet you and conduct you to the house of Major Kursoff."

"And where does Major Kursoff live?"

"Under the citadel walls. I would guide you there; but you do not trust me."

Olaf felt ashamed of his suspicion.

"Lead on and I'll follow," he said.

The old Jew bowed low again, and hobbled off through the streets, which were beginning slowly to fill with people, till they came under the walls of the convict prison.

Then he stopped and pointed to a large house.

"That is Major Kursoff's."

Olaf thanked him and threw him a piece of silver, saying:

"If you'll tell me your name, I'll remember it as that of an honest man."

"My name is Issai Formitch," answered the old man, pocketing the coin, "and I humbly thank your nobility."

Olaf went up to the door of the large house, and tied his horse to a post. Then he knocked.

After a little came a shuffling of feet, and a frowsy-looking man with a partly-shaven head and a branded face came out. He had the sullen, ferocious expression of most convicts, but he wore no chains.

"God save your nobility; what do you want so early?" he said gruffly.

"I want to see Major Kursoff."

"The major is in bed, taking his tea. No one can see him till he is dressed."

"But I must see him, dressed or not," said Olaf, sharply, stepping into the house as he spoke, and brushing by the convict.

The man made no resistance, beyond grumbling:

"This must be a prince of the blood in disguise that says *must* to the major."

"Go and tell the major," continued Olaf, "that a gentleman with a special commission from St. Petersburg is here on important business."

The convict bowed slightly and shuffled away, leaving Olaf alone in the hall.

"These pigs have no manners," growled the irate swordmaster. "I did not come to Siberia to be treated like a lackey."

He advanced to the nearest door, threw it open, and found himself in a large drawing-room, where he made himself comfortable without asking permission of any one, lighting the last cigar he had saved since his journey began.

It was half smoked through when he heard a noise at the door; and, turning, beheld a tall, portly gentleman, with an air of severe dignity, and a keen, handsome face staring at him.

"God save your nobility," he said, rising and bowing courteously.

"You are at home, it seems," was the severe answer of the portly gentleman. "Do you know where you are? Why did you not stay where my servant left you?"

"Because," retorted Olaf, whose temper was rising, "I am not a lackey but a gentleman, and because I carry the order of the Czar in my pocket, to which you *must* bow."

The portly gentleman remained stiff.

"Where are your credentials?" was all he said.

Olaf drew out the Czar's letter and held it out.

The major took it and looked at it very carefully, and then remarked quietly:

"This paper is a forgery."

"What?"

The swordmaster was so indignant for a moment that he could not speak. He fairly foamed at the mouth with fury.

At last he roared out:

"You infamous scoundrel, I am Olaf Svenson, who has faced down Czar Nicolas in his day. Do you think you can make a fool of me? I saw that paper signed."

The portly gentleman remained cool as ice. He held out the paper for Olaf to take, asking:

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, and I don't care," cried Olaf fiercely; "except that I'll make you eat your words, or give me satisfaction."

The portly gentleman smiled and then frowned.

"I will tell you. I am Major Kursoff, lieutenant governor of this town, and if you do not apologize for your insolence, I will put you under arrest in another minute."

He looked in earnest, and Olaf grew grave and civil, as he always did in moments of real danger.

"See here, major," he said, "there seems to be a little mistake here. I hold the order of the Czar himself, commanding *all* persons, *all*, mark you, to obey me. Do you refuse to obey that order?"

The major shook his head.

"You have no such order; you are an impostor: that paper is a forgery."

Olaf took the paper from his hand; folded it, and put it away in his bosom.

Then he came up close to the major.

"You are a liar and a coward," he said.

The major was a two-hundred-pounder; the Dane was shriveled down to less than a hundred and fifty; but he did not raise his hand as he said this.

The major, however, much to his surprise, made no offer to resent the outrageous insult, but quietly answered:

"Is that your opinion? Well, you make a great mistake, as you will find."

Olaf scanned him from head to foot with a glance of inexpressible disgust, and then turned on his heel and went to the door.

"I will go out into the street," he said, "and will compel the soldiers to obey me."

"You will not stir from this house," was the quietly determined response.

"We shall see," retorted the swordmaster, and he laid his hand on the door to open it.

At that very moment the major stamped his foot and cried out in Russian:

"Let him drop!"

How it happened the swordmaster could not tell; but the floor seemed to drop from under his feet and he found himself falling down, down into utter darkness, while the trap-door clanged to over his head.

Then he went souse into a black pool of water, struggled to swim, and found himself standing at last up to his chin in a cistern, as it seemed; where not a ray of light came to cheer him.

The shock and its suddenness for one little

moment unnerved even the iron-willed Olaf. Then, as soon as he felt that he was not dead, nor likely to drown his courage came back. He began slowly to move about and feel the bottom of his prison with his feet.

The floor was perfectly smooth beyond a thin slime of mud, and it seemed also to be perfectly flat.

Slowly and cautiously he felt his way about with his arms extended, and at last touched a smooth wall.

Then he felt his way along the wall till he had satisfied himself that it was of brick and circular in shape.

Clearly he was in a cistern.

The next question was, how he should get out of it unassisted? He had no time yet to think of anything else.

It had not yet occurred to him that the major could be an impostor himself. He looked on him simply as a Russian officer who had been bribed by some emissary of Prince Gavril.

As minute after minute passed and still no light to cheer him, the swordmaster began to realize that the water was very cold, and that he was gradually becoming chilled to the bone through his clothes.

As soon as he found this he began to shout at the top of his voice:

"Halloo! halloo! Major Kursoff! halloo!"

No answer.

He kept on shouting for half an hour at least, his voice becoming fainter and he himself more and more benumbed.

At last the trap-door opened overhead and a flood of light poured down, in the midst of which he saw the shaven head of the ex-convict, peering down at him, grinning maliciously.

"Help me out," cried Olaf faintly. "Is this a way to treat a gentleman and an officer?"

The shaven poll bobbed.

"A very good way indeed," cried the ex-convict. "I'd like to have you all there, you *bad-ones!*"

"Is it humanity? Dare you treat a brother man so?" asked Olaf desperately, for he felt himself almost gone.

The convict's face changed, and Olaf heard him talking to some one.

Presently the keen, stern face of the major looked over the edge of the trap.

"Is that paper a forgery?" he asked.

"You know it is not," cried Olaf.

"Very well then; drown," was the cold reply.

"Shut the door, Louka."

"Stay," cried the Dane desperately. "Life is sweet. I'll admit any thing."

"Will you give up the paper, sign a letter admitting it a forgery, and leave the country forever?" asked the major, sternly.

"No," cried Olaf, huskily, for his legs were shaking under him. "Curse you for a coward! I'll haunt you!"

He thought he was doomed, and next moment he felt the water rise to his mouth and nose. In fact he had fallen back exhausted.

Then he seemed to fall asleep.

When he woke he was in bed, wrapped up in blankets, and found that he had been stripped of all his clothing, which had been carried away. The room was as hot as an oven, but he felt his own skin cold, and the external heat was peculiarly grateful but for the pricking of millions of needle points all over his body and limbs, which gave him intense pain.

He knew then what had happened to him. He had been resuscitated from drowning.

The room in which he lay was close to a metal roof, on which the sun beat all day, and it was lighted by a single small round window.

Where he was and how he came there he could not remember, till he heard the sound of breathing near him.

Then he turned his head and beheld Sofia the Gipsy seated by the bedside tranquilly smoking a Russian cigarette.

"You are awake," she said with a sarcastic smile. "You see I am here."

"So I see."

"And now you cannot leave me."

"So it seems."

"You have no clothes."

"A most ingenious plan to keep me."

"Yes, and what is more, we have the jewels."

"You lie," he answered quietly.

She changed color slightly.

"How do you know I lie?"

"Because if you had the jewels, I should not be here. Failing to find them, you had to help me out, in the hope of forcing me to tell you where they are."

"Well argued."

"And truly."

"Perhaps. Any way you are a fool, Olaf, to take all this trouble to get back two trifles for the tyrant Alexander."

"The Czar Alexander pays me; I eat his bread; and I will be faithful to him," was the firm reply of the Norseman.

"You are a fool. God gives the bread, and all men are the same in his sight. It is not the Czar's bread, but God's."

"God anointed him Czar, and he has been kind to me. I will not betray him."

"Ah, I see. You are a coward and a slave."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You believe in the right of one man to rule over millions; to torture and imprison; to beat and kill at his will. You see a few brave men who strive against this, and you take the side of the stronger every time."

The swordmaster stared and yawned. He had never heard the humanitarian or nihilist doctrine before, and it sounded to him nonsensical.

"Bah!" he said, "if you had your way, there would be no government."

"And why not?" she asked eagerly. "God is our king, because he made us. The Czar will rot into just the same corruption as his slaves. Why is he any better than they?"

He yawned again. "In the mean time, Sofia, what am I doing here, and where is Major Kursoff?"

She laughed scornfully.

"Fool, you never saw Major Kursoff. I told you that you would be sorry for leaving me, and here you are, powerless. You are in the hands of the Brotherhood of Darkness."

"The Brotherhood of Darkness? Who the devil are they, Sofia?"

"The nihilists, as the world calls them."

"Never heard of them."

"You will know them before you have done."

"Well, and what do they want of me?"

"The jewels you stole from me."

"You mean the emperor's jewels, which you stole from the crown, and which I am carrying back to the lawful owner."

She laughed again, a hard, bitter laugh.

"Fool, where did the pearl come from?"

"The bottom of the sea."

"And the diamond?"

"From the mine."

"Who put them there? God. God is their only lawful owner."

"But the Czar bought them of the men who found them, so they are his."

"The men who found them did not own them, if they belong to God. They were mine as much as they were the Czar's jewels."

Olaf curled his lip.

"Sofia, from the way you talk, one would fancy no one owned anything."

"No more they do. All things belong to God, who gives them to the nations, in trust to distribute equally to all."

"Then I shall hold on to what I have safe," he answered, dryly, turning over from her. "You can talk as long as you please, but you can't find the jewels without me to help you, Sofia."

"You will give a different answer in a day or two," retorted she, sharply.

Then she went away, leaving Olaf to his own not over pleasant reflections.

CHAPTER XIV.

BROTHER PAUL.

THE reflections of the swordmaster were not overpleasant as he lay wrapped up in the blankets without so much as a shirt to venture forth in. He was clearly a close prisoner, and powerless to escape.

Who were these humanitarians or Nihilists, he had not the least idea. In those days they had not become so famous as they did subsequently.

What they were going to do with him he knew not, but one thing was certain, he could not get out.

And there is no position so helpless as that of a civilized man in the midst of a crowded city, after his clothes have been stolen.

In a tropical climate it is bad enough, but in a civilized Northern country it is still worse. To a Dane or a Swede, or an Englishman, coming from a prudish people, the predicament is horrible.

Olaf had no idea of fighting now.

The fight had been taken out of him for the time most effectively; first by his ducking; second by the stealing of his clothes.

He lay there for some time, revolving what he should do, and how get himself out of his scrape, when he heard the bells tolling twelve o'clock, and recognized that he must be not far off from several churches.

He draped a blanket round him and went to the little round window to look out.

He found that, as he had expected, he was at the top of the house, which was quite a lofty structure, and as there were no shutters or outside water pipes, it was not an easy thing for him to think of making his escape that way.

Besides, what would he do, alone in Tobolsk, without a rag on him? Who would believe his story?

In truth, from the summit of power, by the simple robbery of his clothes and papers, the Dane had suddenly been turned into a stranger in a strange land, and it was absolutely necessary for him to regain them before he could take any steps to see his imperiled comrade Tekli Aga.

For the swordmaster to see a difficulty was to plan a way of escape; and Olaf had the cunning of a fox when he thought it was not a time for fighting.

He went back to his bed with only one idea

in his head, how to deceive his foes, and especially the keen-witted Sofia.

He took a sleep over it; for Olaf was a man who could sleep under almost any circumstances.

He was waked up by the clinking of glass and crockery, and found the sullen-faced Louka standing by the bedside with a tray.

"Well, what the deuce do you want?" asked Olaf yawning.

"Me! nothing. You? food. Take it."

Louka was a man of few words, and he set down the tray.

As he was leaving the room, Olaf called out:

"Louka, Louka, my dear Louka."

The ex-convict halted.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"My dear Louka, if you could find me my clothes, there is quite a nice little sum of money in the pocket I could give you."

Louka sneered.

"I've got that already."

"But there is something else you've not got, my dear Louka."

The ex-convict came back eagerly.

"What is it; the jewels?"

"Never mind, my dear Louka. If you and I, now, were in a little partnership, it might be a very good thing for you, Louka. I have known a man pardoned for less."

The convict looked at him with an evil, savage look.

"Pardon!" he echoed gloomily. "Can all the pardons of all the Czsars, from Ivan down to Alexander, take out this?"

He snote his hand on the ugly red brand on his brow with a horrible curse, and swung out of the room, banging and locking the door behind him.

"For all that," said Olaf to himself, "that heaven will work."

It did and to some purpose.

Louka was, as his face indicated, a most atrocious scoundrel. He had committed seven or eight of the most sickening and cold-blooded murders, of which five were those of children of tender-year, for the sake of a few rubles.

And yet Louka had a soft spot in his heart.

It may sound incredible to say that such a villain could have a soft spot anywhere; but in Louka's case it was a fact.

Louka had a mother.

He had broken her heart by his wickedness, and many a stick over her back when he was more drunk than usual; but for all that he loved his mother, and, since he had come out of his twenty-year term, he had heard that the poor old woman was still alive.

He began to have some strange glimmering of a desire to go away from Siberia, back to the little village of Ivanoffka, where he was born, to kneel at his mother's feet, and pour in her lap all his savings, so that he might hear her say:

"Louka has come back."

And accordingly, just about four in the afternoon, when Olaf, who had finished his dinner with excellent appetite, was lying half asleep, in came Louka to take away the tray, and remarked apologetically:

"I am sorry the food is no better, most high-born one, but the chief is not rich."

Coming from a furious republican like Louka, the common courtesy of "most high-born one," was simply a surrender.

Olaf turned lazily round.

"Have you brought my clothes, Louka?"

"No." Louka grew sullen again.

"Why not?"

"Because the chief gave orders not to let you have them till you told where the jewels were."

"And then?"

"Why, then, it will be all right."

"All right?"

"Yes, all right. Why do you mock me?"

"Louka, you're lying."

"Well, what of it? Why do you ask a fool's question?"

"You know that if I tell where the jewels are, you'd set on me and cut my throat at once, to prevent my informing the police of the existence of this house."

Louka was silent.

"Louka," pursued the Dane tranquilly, "if you will get me my clothes, I will make you a rich man and take you with me to St. Petersburg. You need not be afraid of that brand. We have in the city doctors who can remove worse scars than that."

Louka started eagerly.

"Is that true?"

"Certainly."

"And you are sure you could get me a pardon from our father the Czar?"

Another token of yielding. Louka was coming back to his old childish trust in the Czar, as the father of his people.

"I can, if you will get me my clothes and all the papers that were in them."

"I will try, most high-born one."

Louka went away, and came up in about half an hour.

He merely put his head in at the door and whispered:

"Look out; the chief's coming."

Then he vanished.

A little while after, the door opened, and into the room stalked the tall portly gentleman, whom Olaf had taken for Major Kursoff till he found out his mistake.

The Nihilist chief—for such he was, and one very high in rank in the order—was a very handsome man in face, with a noble and benevolent forehead and tophead, a thin intellectual nose, beautiful teeth under thin lips, and a firm massive jaw. His face was clean shaven, and his massive figure was dressed in civilized clothes. He opened the conversation with the ease of a man of the world.

"I was sorry to have to let you down so very suddenly to-day, but self-preservation is the first law of nature, my dear sir."

"Indeed," was all the other answered.

"Yes. Had we not been warned about you in advance of your visit here a very worthy gentleman might now be sentenced to a life in chains for a simple love scrape."

"What do you mean?"

I mean that poor Gavril Nesseldorf, who is after all, only a young fool, does not deserve to be branded in the forehead, like poor Louka, simply for trying to please the woman he loved by a little harmless frolic."

"Ah, that is the way you call it?"

"Yes: how do you?"

"I say that Gavril Nesseldorf, a young fool as you say, deliberately tried to slap the face of his majesty the Czar, and deserves all he gets for his boldness."

The Nihilist smiled.

"I see: you have the old notions. You think the Czar more than a man, his people less than men. That is all."

"I don't understand you."

"I can make you, I think. Suppose I slap your face, what would you do?"

"I should give you one prop that would lay you out stiff for a week."

The Nihilist stared, and then laughed.

"My dear sir, you jest."

"I do not. What I say is my kindest way. It is what I do, if I am not very angry."

"And what do you do if you are very angry?" asked the Russian curiously.

"I kill men then."

Olaf's tone was perfectly quiet.

The Nihilist chief rubbed the side of his nose with an air of comical vexation.

"My illustration fails," he said.

Then he brightened up.

"Come, my dear sir, we will make another little supposition."

"Go on," said Olaf dryly. "I am ready."

"Suppose a man were to steal from you a pair of sleeve-buttons, when you had already about fifty more pairs."

"Well, what then?"

"Suppose further you had the thief in your power, and were allowed to punish him all you wanted, even to killing him."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, how would you punish him?"

Olaf sat up in bed thoughtfully.

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On many things. The man might be starving and have a family."

"Well, what then?"

"In that case I would say: 'Look here, you poor devil. Take the buttons and sell them for what they're worth, and don't let me see your face again for some time.'"

The Nihilist seemed pleased.

"Indeed? Every one would not do that."

"Well, I would."

"But suppose he had done it in a frolic to please a girl?"

"Why, then," said Olaf, grimly, "I would take him by the ear before his girl and say: 'Look here, you young idiot, I'll teach you to leave my things alone, girl or no girl,' and with that I would give him three good hard kicks where he sits down."

The other laughed heartily.

"Excellent! It would serve him right."

Olaf smiled too. He did not quite see what the other was driving at.

Then the Nihilist suddenly changed his tone.

"My dear sir," he said, gravely, "are you a man of honor?"

Olaf colored.

"I hope so."

"You are, you perceive, my prisoner."

"I know that, and I know why, too, I live."

"Why?"

"Because you want to find the jewels that Gavril stole from the crown, and I have hid them away."

"You are wrong."

"Wrong?"

"Yes, wrong. You do not in the least understand the sacred principles of our order."

"Then why did you not let me drown?"

"I was very near letting you drown, as it was."

"But you did not."

"No, and you will never guess why."

"Because you feared the law?"

"Not a bit of it. No one would ever have found you. This house, right under the nose of the commandant of the prison, is not even suspected."

"Why then?"
 "Because I saw you were a brave man."
 "Thank you."
 "And because we need such men in our ranks as you."

Olaf stared.
 "By Jove! Do you know what you are doing, Major—ah, Mr.—"
 "Call me Brother Paul."
 "Well, Brother Paul, do you know what you are doing?"
 "Certainly; I am sensible."
 "You are trying to convert me."
 "Exactly; and I shall do it."

Olaf laughed grimly.
 "Will you? I defy you. I am too tough an old soldier, and too much used to the necessity of discipline, to give in to any such silly doctrines as those of equality."

Brother Paul smiled good-humoredly.
 "Nevertheless, we will make of you a very fair Nihilist, after a little."

"How?"
 "You shall see. In the first place let me remind you that you yourself have said that the just punishment of Prince Gavril Nesseldorf should be slight and contemptuous."

"I said no such thing."
 "Pardon me. The parallel was exact. Out of all the treasures of the Czar, those two little jewels, both small enough to be swallowed and never felt, are as insignificant as a pair of sleeve-buttons to a man who has fifty. The true punishment would be, as you say, to kick the culprit and dismiss him."

"Well, but you forget that his crime was an insult to his sovereign."

"My dear sir, did he choose his sovereign? Had his sovereign ever done anything for him that he should reverence him?"

"Yes," said Olaf, firmly; "he had emancipated seven million serfs."

"And thereby taken away half of Gavril's wealth. Of the two, which had injured the other most?"

"But Gavril never had any right to the serfs," cried the Dane. "Come, you cannot get the best of me on logic."

"And had Alexander any better right to the crown?"

"Of course he had. He paid for it, or at least his ancestors did."

"How did they get the money?"

"I don't know."

"I'll tell you. Out of rents of crown lands which they had seized by force. They were nothing but robbers on a large scale. Well, history calls them heroes; and Gavril is a robber on a small scale. Would you like to see how he will be punished, if they catch him and you betray him?"

Olaf was silent.

"If you will give me your parole of honor as a soldier not to attempt to betray me or to escape, I will give you your clothes and papers, and you shall be free to-day," continued Brother Paul, looking earnestly at Olaf.

The swordmaster hesitated.

"I only want you to see, with your own eyes, the punishment to which you, a foreigner, working for money alone, would willfully condemn a fellow-creature, who is, after all, only the consequence of an odious system."

Olaf bowed his head gravely.

"Brother Paul, I give you my word. Moreover, I want to warn you. Do not trust that Louka. I was about to corrupt him, and your generosity has made me ashamed of myself. I promise."

Brother Paul rose briskly.

"Poor Louka is easily tempted. Under this vile system he is a straw tossed in an eddy. In a better system he might have been a happy man and a good one."

He threw open the door; called Louka, and said to Olaf courteously:

"I shall expect you in the drawing-room."

"Please to have the trap-door fastened," said Olaf, with such a wiry face that Brother Paul laughed and cried out:

"Certainly. After all, it was a heavy dose."

Then he went down-stairs and Louka brought the swordmaster his clothing, which had been dried and renovated, while his papers, all stained and shriveled as they were with water, were yet legible and practically uninjured.

The Dane was very thoughtful while he was dressing. He had never deemed it possible that, without any fighting, and simply by the power of one man's mind, such a revolution could be experienced by his nature, in all its strong, preconceived opinions.

He was beginning to think Brother Paul a very good fellow, visionary perhaps, but still a good honest man.

He came down-stairs and paused at the door of that treacherous drawing-room.

He felt nervous about a second fall.

Brother Paul came to meet him and led him to a sofa, saying:

"Do not be alarmed; it is bolted."

Then the Nihilist began:

"You have reason to think us hard folks to live with, but it was a matter of self-preservation. You have in your possession a paper which gives you unlimited power over a mem-

ber of our order, and, had you once reached General Goryantcheff with it, a terrible persecution of many innocent men would have ensued, and all about two little bits of colored glass."

"Then why was such a fuss made about the giving of them up?" asked Olaf dryly.

Brother Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"All the vile system. It debauches morals and natures alike: has made of a beautiful girl, fit to be a princess, a wretched outcast; and has turned you, a man of honor, into a monster of cruelty."

Olaf colored.

"No, no, not so bad as that."

"You shall see. I am about to show you a spectacle you will never forget. It is that of the fate to which you would condemn that foolish young man, for loving a woman too much."

He rose up.

"Will you take a walk in Tobolsk with me? It is right to inform you that I am a perpetual exile, and have been a convict. The punishment I show you to-day I once suffered myself."

"And for what?"

Olaf couldn't help asking the question.

Brother Paul smiled sadly.

"For the same fault as was once laid to my namesake of Tarsus—'stirring up sedition.' Colonel Svenson, I am a peasant's son who dared to educate himself and preach the gospel of justice. I edited a paper, and I dared to say that Nicolas was a tyrant and a blunderer, and that Sebastopol would be taken."

"But it was taken."

"Not then. The Czar avenged himself; time avenged me. I finished my term a year ago, but Alexander will never forgive me. Come, let us go."

They went out into the streets, and as Olaf passed along, he noticed that his companion was saluted by many people, officers and all, and appeared to be held in great respect.

They came to the gate of the convict prison and heard the roll of a drum in the court-yard. Brother Paul showed the sentry a red ticket and they were allowed to enter. In the court-yard were drawn up several hundred soldiers in two long lines facing each other and each man held in his hands a pair of white sticks.

"A man is going to run the gantlet," said Brother Paul in a low tone. "He is sentenced to three thousand blows with the sticks."

CHAPTER XV.

"THE GREEN STREET."

BROTHER PAUL seemed to be as well known inside the prison as outside, though no one actually spoke to him. There seemed to be some etiquette about this and Olaf asked about it.

"I have been a convict in my time," was the reply, and it is below the dignity of an officer to speak to an ex-convict. But they all know me, and more than one has had favors of me."

"Favors? of what kind?"

"Chinese goods. I am the agent of the largest house in the Chinese trade and the general and all the officers are glad to get presents of teas and silks from me, that have not paid duties."

"What! do they connive at smuggling them?"

"My dear sir, in Russia every man cheats the Czar in every department except his own. It is immoral, but as I told you it is all in the vile system. Let it go on till it gets so bad that all the people will rise against it as one man. Then Russia will be free. In the mean time here comes the unhappy one."

Again the roll of the drum, and a tall well built young convict with a pleasant face came out of the prison escorted by a corporal and four men with fixed bayonets.

He was ghastly pale and his eyes had a wild, frightened stare in them as he looked round the yard. His lips were firmly shut, but his body was trembling violently.

"Who is he?" whispered Olaf.

"That is the man sentenced to take a walk down the green street, as the convicts call it," replied Brother Paul.

"Walk down the green street? How?"

"To run the gantlet."

"What! that man! How is it done?"

"You see those soldiers?"

"Surely I do."

"You notice every one has two sticks."

"Yes, but—"

"Every stick in those two lines will fall on that man's bare back within ten minutes from now with all the owner's strength, unless—"

"Unless—what?"

"Unless the man falls dead."

"Dead. Do they die under the punishment?"

"Often, when their sentences are high like the sentence of this man."

"And what do you call a high sentence?"

"From three to five thousand strokes."

"What, all at once?"

"If the man can stand it; but the doctors are always there to watch. If they think he will die they will stop it for the time."

"And what then?"

"The man goes to the hospital to get well."

When he is well he comes back to get the rest of his allowance. Generally they divide up a large sentence into parts of a thousand strokes each."

Olaf shuddered slightly in spite of himself, and Brother Paul said quietly:

"But strong men live through it. I had two thousand strokes at one time, and yet, as you see, I live."

Olaf said nothing, but the sweat rolled down his forehead.

The poor wretch was led out into the middle of the court-yard, and a tall fat officer with a very red face called out:

"Corporal, see your man stripped."

"That is Major Kursoff," whispered Brother Paul to Olaf. "He would jump for joy to help you punish the prince."

But all Olaf could say was:

"What has that poor fellow done?"

"He was sent here for making love to the daughter of a nobleman in St. Petersburg. The father found out the affair; trumped up a charge of theft against him, and had him sent to Siberia for ten years. I know he was innocent of the charge, but he came here. The girl got a letter to him, and he tried to escape. He was taken and sentenced to three thousand strokes. Look, they are about to begin now."

In fact, at this moment the corporal put his hand on the young man's shoulder and made a sign for him to strip.

Without a word the convict took off his shirt and jacket and stood there, stripped to the waist, his fetters clanking from his wrists.

He was a finely molded, handsome fellow, with a white skin.

Major Kursoff came toward him with a leer on his fat red face.

"Well, my man, have you nothing to say?"

The prisoner shook his head. He did not dare to open his lips. It was evident that his whole nature was desperately strung up to resist the coming torture, and he feared to break down if he spoke.

The major smiled.

"You are a fine figure of a man to think of making love to a count's daughter, you are. The stick will bring you to your senses."

Still the convict said not a word.

But Major Kursoff was one of those devils of cruelty in human shape, who are only to be found in positions of irresponsible power. He delighted in torture, and it was his object to get the prisoner to beg for mercy.

He became good-natured and jocular in his ways as he proceeded:

"But I don't want to be hard on you. Can I do anything to help you? I am not a cruel man. I have to obey the law and I don't like to see a fine fellow like you spoiled. Come now, wouldn't you like to be let off?"

The poor convict lifted his haggard eyes to those of his officer with a wild look.

"Is it possible, most high-born one?" he faltered, huskily.

"Well, not exactly; but I can tell them to lay it on lightly, to spare you if I please."

The doomed man uttered a groan.

"Oh, most high-born one, be a father to me. Spare me and I will pray for you all my life long."

"I will, my friend, I will. Have you no father then, that I must be one to you?"

"No, most high-born one. It is all in your hands. Be merciful."

"Well, I will for this once. I may catch it myself, but I will take the risk."

The convict broke out sobbing.

"Oh, most high-born one, God bless you."

"But stop!"

The major appeared to be thinking and the poor fellow watched him with terrible and sickening anxiety.

"Who knows this may not make a worse man of you? You may try to escape a second time."

"Most high-born one, I swear by all that is holy I will serve out my term and give no further occasion for complaint."

Kindness of tone had deceived the poor wretch, who had been nerved up against cruelty, and he was pleading piteously.

"Very well. I will take your promise. But we must satisfy the law, you know, just for a form."

The convict's face fell.

"Yes, most high-born one."

"Therefore hold out your hands. We must enter the fact on the books."

"Yes, most high-born one."

The culprit held out his manacled hands and they were immediately fastened to the stocks of two muskets.

The major then continued almost tearfully:

"I must obey the law, but I weep for you, and forgive you, and because you are an orphan, are you not?"

"Yes, your nobility. I am alone in the world."

"I forgive you then but it is for the last time. Take him away."

He spoke so kindly that Olaf who had been watching the scene with breathless interest heaved a sigh of intense relief and muttered:

"Thank God!"

But as the major stepped back there was an evil smile on his fat face.

Two of the guards seized the barrels of the muskets to which the poor wretch is tied. They tucked them under their arms and hold them tightly with both hands.

Two others fall in behind the convict with their bayonets leveled at him.

Then the drum sounds a slow march and the four men march off the convict in their midst, the corporal stalking gravely in front to the entrance of the lane of soldiers.

Every stick rises in the air and the poor convict looks piteously round him, while Olaf's heart seems to stand still.

A fat medical officer with a green sash hurries up to take his place near the convict.

R-R-Rub! R-R-Rub! R-Rub-dub-dub!

The drums beat slowly and they are muffled as at a funeral.

The convict has reached the head of the "green street."

Then the major suddenly explodes in a roar of malicious laughter.

"Beat him!" he yells. "Beat the orphan, beat the villain! Harder, harder! Faster, faster! Go at him! More, more!"

Down fall the sticks on the white back, as the guards slowly drag the poor wretch along, and every man in the line strikes his hardest, while the major yells with laughter as he hurries after him down the line.

"Give it to the dog! Kill the orphan! Kill him! Beat him well, well!"

Olaf had set his teeth hard as the procession started, but the sight and the sickening sound of those blows falling on bare human flesh was too much for him.

He turned white and sick, muttering:

"Brother Paul! For God's sake! can't it be stopped? Poor fellow!"

But Brother Paul says not a word. He is watching the execution with a certain horrible fascination, and he clutches Olaf's hand under his arm with a grip like a vise.

The guards march on.

Every stick falls with the whole strength of a soldier.

Not a man dares spare the culprit.

Not that they are cruel men, for Russians are by nature simple good-hearted folks.

But the major is watching them and woe be-tide the man who spares a blow.

The ingenious procedure of the major has done all he expected it to do.

It has broken down the convict's nerves.

He had come there strung up to endure all in grim silence, but the delusive hopes held out to him and the bitterness of anguish consequent on the deception have proved too much for his will.

He shrieks and struggles to escape.

This is what the major loves to see. He enjoys what he calls "a good kicker."

"Beat him!" he yells. "Beat the villain! Flog the little orphan! Kill the darling!"

He stoops over with his hands on his knees to watch the beating.

And now the procession is half-down the line; the white back is no longer white.

Instead of that it is a sickening mass of black and blue flesh with red patches where the blood has started.

On go the soldiers. Down fall the sticks.

The black and blue are turning to a dull crimson, which glistens in the sun, as the blood comes out and trickles slowly down.

They are two thirds of the way down.

On march the soldiers, and one can hear the sharp crackle of the sticks as the blows fall in showers.

And still the hoarse voice of the major is heard at intervals of laughter:

"Beat the orphan! Flog him well! Harder, harder! Faster, faster!"

At last, when they are near the end of the "green street," the man falls down and is dragged along by his wrists.

Then the doctor holds up his hand, and the sticks are dropped.

The man has fainted away.

The major, too, stops.

"What is your number?" he asks of one of the soldiers—the one who struck the last blow.

"Two hundred and forty," most high-born one."

The major is used to rapid computation.

"Nine hundred and sixty strokes," he says to the corporal. "Take it down, and he shall have the other forty on the next thousand."

Then he turns to the doctor, who is feeling the man's pulse as he lies on the ground.

"Can he take the other forty to-day?"

The doctor shakes his head.

"Send him to the hospital, then," says the major, with a sigh. "These fellows grow more chicken-hearted, every day. Come, gentlemen, it is dinner time."

CHAPTER XVI.

A REVOLUTION OF IDEAS.

OLAF walked quietly away with Brother Paul from the court-yard. His face was marble pale, and he felt sick and dizzy.

The Nihilist said nothing till they got to the house and were seated in the drawing-room.

Then he looked at Olaf, and the swordmaster uttered a slight groan.

"It is horrible, Brother Paul, that men in God's likeness should be such devils. I should like to kill that major. He is not a man. He is a wild beast."

Brother Paul smiled sadly.

"Ah! you are like the rest. You confound the effect with the cause."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you would punish the wrong man."

"How the wrong man?"

"I mean that if you killed Major Kursoff, a worse might take his place."

"Worse could not be."

"You do not know."

"Well, tell me how any man could be worse than the major?"

"One might come who would punish out of the law and beyond the law. The major counts every blow, and never tries to kill a man if he can help it."

Olaf groaned.

"Better be killed at once. And has he to go over all that again?"

"Yes, as soon as his back heals."

"It is horrible. I had rather be killed ten times over, than suffer before so many men, Brother Paul."

"But you see it does not kill. He will go through his next thousand silently."

"Why?"

"Because he will not listen to the major."

"Ah, that major!"

Olaf rose and paced the room excitedly.

"I must call him out and kill him."

"You cannot. He has only done what you are willing to do—what he calls his duty to the Czar."

"Did the Czar tell him to torture that poor wretch with false hopes?"

"No, that was a consequence of the system. No Czar in St. Petersburg; no Major Kursoff in Tobolsk."

"It is the man, not the system. He is a base, cowardly villain, and a disgrace to his cloth."

"You are wrong. He once had a heart as soft as yours. He was a subaltern officer when I came to Tobolsk. He fainted dead away when he first saw a man run the gantlet, and the officers jeered at him. The commandant detailed him to superintend all the floggings in spite of his entreaties, but he was always devoted to his duty, and had to obey. At home he is a kind-hearted man; a good husband and father. It is eight years of constant brutal scenes that have brutalized him."

"But he seemed to enjoy the torture."

"The system makes him. I remember when he used to tell the soldiers to let the culprit off easily, and the consequence was that the convicts used to jeer at him for a chicken-heart. It came to his ears and nettled him, but he kept on. One day a convict struck him; a thing unheard of, and another insulted his wife; who was then a good, kind-hearted soul, who visited in the prison. From that day he changed."

"Did he turn brutal all at once?"

"No. By degrees."

"How?"

"At first he was only stiff and severe, and the men under punishment used to plead with him to soften him without avail. They then began to mock and jeer at him and defy him to make them scream. At last they got his temper up, and from that day he became worse, till he ended where he is now."

Olaf sighed deeply.

"It is all horrible."

"It is indeed."

"I have only one comfort."

"What is that?"

"These coarse peasants are not so sensitive to pain as we gentlemen."

Brother Paul smiled bitterly.

"You forget. I too have run the gantlet three times."

Olaf stared and muttered.

"I had forgotten. It is incredible."

Brother Paul rose and took off his coat and vest.

"You shall see for yourself," he said.

Olaf watched him with undisguised and painful curiosity.

When Brother Paul took off his shirt at last, the swordmaster uttered a cry of horror and anger.

The Nihilist's back was covered with ridges and furrows, crossing each other, the skin all puckered up where it had healed unevenly, the color of the whole being a dull red, seamed with gray and black.

Not a square inch, from the nape of the neck to the hips, was left whole.

The Russian smiled sadly at the other.

"I do not regret it now," he said. "I would that there should be millions such in the land to waken the people to the truth that it is the system that is wrong."

"Why, what would you do?"

"No Czar, no gantlet. It is this vile system that the many must suffer that one may live in a palace, which is wrong. That it is which makes Russia a land of mourning. It must be destroyed, root and branch, to effect any good. Czar, princess, counts, barons, all must go; all

must die or be exiled; the army destroyed; the prison blown up; the convicts set free; the priests turned out; the churches burned; the palaces pulled down, everything destroyed."

His tone had grown wild, and his eyes gleamed as he spoke.

Standing there, with his scarred back, a mute protest to heaven against the tyranny of a fellow-man, the Nihilist leader seemed to be transformed into a prophet of evil.

"But that is impossible," urged Olaf.

"Nothing is impossible to brave man," answered the Russian solemnly. "It may not come in my life; but it will come at last. Russia will be free."

He turned quietly away and resumed his clothes in silence, Olaf watching him.

After a little while the swordmaster said:

"But Prince Gavril is noble, and I thought they never sentenced nobles to the stick."

"That is true. But Sofia is no noble."

"Sofia?"

"Yes, the Gipsy girl, his accomplice."

"But surely women do not get the stick."

"No, they get the knout."

"Is that worse?"

"The stick bruises; the knout cuts. A strong man can stand a thousand blows of the stick. Fifty blows of the knout would kill a Hercules, for the thirtieth would cut in between his ribs into his lungs and heart."

Olaf shuddered.

"The prince would be degraded and sentenced for life. Possibly he too might get the knout. Such is the Russian system."

Olaf shook his head.

"God knows it is a bad one."

"Then you think on the whole, if the Czar gets back his trinkets, and Gavril is sent to some foreign land, you will have done your duty?" said Brother Paul, inquiringly.

Olaf hesitated.

"The prince tried to murder me."

"It is true."

"And he deserves punishment therefor."

Brother Paul nodded.

"Moreover, my comrade, Tekli Aga, is now in his power. If he harms him, I cannot answer for the result."

"He shall not be harmed."

"How can you prevent it?"

Brother Paul smiled.

"You do not know who I am. Tell me, where is your friend?"

Olaf gave him a short history of their trip in search of the prince, and an outline of their adventures in pursuit.

When he had finished, Brother Paul remarked:

"If your friend was badly hurt, I cannot be held responsible; but if he is able to travel, he shall be here in a week."

"The day I see him safe here, I give my word to proceed no further with arresting the prince. But the jewels I must take back, as I promised the Czar."

"You shall, if you want it."

Brother Paul rose and called Louka.

"Go and tell Issai Formitch I want him," he said.

Louka shuffled away, and in ten minutes after the decrepit figure of the old Jew hobbled into the room.

Olaf shook his finger at him.

"Rascally Jew, who told me this was the house of Major Kursoff?"

Issai rubbed his hands, bowed and whined:

"Don't kill me, most high-born one. I have to make my living somehow and to obey the orders of the good people, or the bad ones would eat us all up at once."

Brother Paul interposed kindly.

"The gentleman is not angry, Issai. He has relented. Where is your Tartar, Bi Tabouk?"

"Waiting orders, most mighty one."

"Tell him to go to Prince Gavril's house and give my orders to the brethren to send here the Circassian, Tekli Aga, if he be able to travel in a telega."

"Yes, most mighty."

"If he be dangerously wounded, bring back word at once."

"Yes, most mighty."

"Stop. Send him to me. He may know."

Issai bowed and hobbled away.

Ten minutes afterward Bi Tabouk, in his rough Tartar dress, was bowing with great respect before Brother Paul.

"You came from Prince Gavril's house?"

"Yes, most mighty."

"Did you see the Circassian, Tekli Aga?"

"Yes, most mighty."

"Was he alive?"

"Yes, most mighty."

"Was he much hurt? Tell us."

"He had a clip from a scythe down one leg, and a stab from a fork; but he was in bed and doing well."

"How long will it take you to bring him here, if he be able to travel?"

"In a week, most mighty."

"Go give the prince my orders to let him go, and let the prince stay till he receives more word from me."

Bi Tabouk hesitated.

"Well, what is it?"

"I fear, most mighty, that the prince is not very tractable."

"Why not?"

"He pines after his Gipsy, this Sofia."

"Where is she?"

"She was here to-day," interposed Olaf.

"Yes, I know. She is one of us. But she went out again. Where's Louka?"

"Here, most mighty."

It is reasonable to suppose Louka had been listening at the door from the promptness with which he popped in.

"Where is Sofia, the Gipsy?"

"Gone to Nesseldorf, most mighty."

Brother Paul frowned.

"She had no orders. Ah, you people will need many a lesson before you learn the necessity of discipline."

He turned to Olaf.

"You see: it is all the system. They are so used to stick law that reason law has no hold on them yet. It will take a generation to teach them the obedience of necessity and love."

Then to Bi Tabouk:

"If you overtake her on the road, help her along. He will be quiet when he gets her again. Go and be quick."

Bi Tabouk bowed and went away.

"And now," said Brother Paul to the Dane, "you have seen but little of Tobolsk. While we wait for your friend you are my guest. I must show you what there is to be seen. You have not seen our storehouses yet. You must know I am general agent for the firm Golakoff, Martineff & Co., of Moscow, Riga and Tobolsk. We send goods to China overland through the Tartars and get back tea and silks. It is an interesting place for a stranger. Then there are the steppes, always beautiful in summer. I cannot go on them, alas, for I am on the exile list, but there is no prohibition to others, and your papers will pass you anywhere. I would advise you to take a trip to one of the Kirghiz aouls. You will find the Tartars honest and pleasant people."

Olaf consented to go around with Brother Paul, and came to the conclusion, before the day was over, that Tobolsk was a very nice place to live in if it were not for the convicts. They seemed to meet him at every turn of the streets in their gloomy processions, with their clanking chains and shaven polls, many with the red brand of eternal shame on their desperate faces.

And the longer he staid in Tobolsk, the greater became his horror of the convict system and the less his resentment against the very Prince Gavril he had formerly felt so determined to take back in irons to St. Petersburg. He felt as if he would never dare to think of putting a free man in chains again.

In Tobolsk so many wore chains and in nine cases out of ten the punishment seemed so hideously disproportioned to the guilt that as Brother Paul had prophesied, Olaf the Dane was fast becoming a very fair specimen of a Nihilist as far as his feelings went.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOFIA'S PLOT.

THE month of July was well advanced in Western Siberia when a telega, carrying a gentleman and lady was driving rapidly over the steppes of the Ukraine in Russian Europe along a level dirt road, going toward the town of Nazar.

Nazar is a small place, not down on most of the maps, save that it is correctly located on the Government surveys and said to be on the Nesseldorf grant of 1798.

The whole town is in fact virtually owned by one man, the reigning Prince Nesseldorf, to whom all the shop-keepers pay rent for their holdings, while his sumptuous palace stands on the only eminence on that part of the land. Not much of a hill to be sure, fifty feet being its utmost altitude; but a fifty-foot hillock commands quite a view on a dead flat, like the Ukraine.

The gentleman was Prince Gavril; the lady Sofia the Gipsy, attired in all the finery of a Frenchwoman, having dropped her wild Gipsy costume entirely.

She looked happy and triumphant and the prince seemed to be nervously anxious to please her, for he was constantly arranging her shawl or paying her little attentions.

"Well, Gavrilka," she said at last, "are you quite sure you are going to do right?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"You remember I am still a Gipsy to the backbone."

"I know you are the most beautiful girl in Russia."

"I shall give you plenty of trouble."

"You cannot more than you have done."

"But then I did not bear your name. Now you are responsible for me, for we are married."

"I know it and I am glad of it. No one can take you from me."

"Don't be too sure. Gipsies are fickle as the wind, and no luck comes to them if they mate with those not of their own race."

"I have taken the risk. Besides we shall not stay in Russia."

"Where do you propose going?"

"To France, Germany, Italy, Spain, anywhere out of Russia."

"You are right. I hate Russia now."

"Why?"

"Because it reminds me of my failure."

"Failure! Why, we are safe. Brother Paul deceived that devil of a swordmaster—"

"But he carried off the jewels, and by this time you are the jest of St. Petersburg."

Gavril Nesseldorf colored.

"Never mind. We are safe. Suppose we had kept them. By this time we might have been in arrest."

"Yes and the talk of the world. Now it is all hushed up except in society gossip. I tell you they laugh at you."

He turned peevishly away.

"Why will you—"

"Why will I what?"

"Bring up that topic. It does no good."

"No; because you have no spirit."

"No spirit?"

He crimsoned angrily.

"No, no spirit. You ought to have been a shopkeeper."

"Why?"

"You are so enamored of your own safety."

"And you seem to want to put me into all the unnecessary peril you can."

"I want to be the wife of a brave man."

"I am no coward."

She laughed sarcastically.

"No. You obey orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Brother Paul's."

"Well, I keep my word to the brotherhood."

"You do indeed."

There was no mistaking the sneer.

"What do you want me to do?"

His tone was desperately peevish.

"No matter. You dare not do it."

"I dare do anything—anything."

"And will you do what I ask?"

Incautiously he answered.

"Yes."

Immediately her arms were round him.

"My Gavrilka, my brave Gavrilka. That is the man I loved of old."

Then she changed her tone to a whisper.

"Kill the swordmaster."

"How can I? I don't even know where he is."

"But I do."

"Where? In St. Petersburg?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet? How do you know?"

"I know more than you do yet. You have only been a month in the order; I three years."

"Well, what of that?"

"Consequently, I am higher than you. Women rise as high as men there, and I am trusted with secrets."

"You have to obey the same as I."

"Only one man—the chief."

"Who is he? Brother Paul?"

"No, a greater than he. Brother Paul is only the Siberian Head."

"Well, what does this tend to?"

"That if you will do as I tell you, we will get back the jewels, and be safe in Switzerland in a week."

He stared at her amazed.

"Ah, you wonder at my words."

"I confess I do. I had no idea—"

"That I knew so much. Possibly, I can tell you several things that would very much astonish you."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, Olaf Svenson and his friend the Circassian only started from Tobolsk yesterday."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"Well what next?"

"Next, the chief is not at all satisfied with the compromise made by Brother Paul."

"Indeed?"

"No. He thinks the swordmaster should have been killed and the jewels recovered."

"But he had hidden them away."

"He should have been flattered with hopes of safety till he had revealed the hiding-place and then quietly put out of the way."

"But that would have been dishonorable."

"All is fair in our war."

"Well, and what now?"

"Now the plan is to surprise him out of Brother Paul's district."

"Why out of his district?"

"Because Brother Paul is a powerful man, and it will not do to offend him. But the chief thinks him weak to let go the jewels."

"So he was," retorted Gavril gloomily.

"But there are some things Brother Paul can do which no one else can do. For instance, at his nod, all the convicts would rise. But he obeys orders and never meddles with what takes place outside his district."

"And what are we to do?"

"We individually very little."

"But you said I was to—"

"Do as I ask you. Yes."

"Well what do you ask?"

"Simply that you should go to Kazan with me. This Olaf will pass through there in three days and the Brothers will be ready to pounce

on him. We are to receive the jewels and carry them off again."

Gavril hesitated.

"But we shall be in the power of the law."

"Of course," she retorted coolly, "that makes all the fun to me."

"But not to me. I have something to lose—"

"What?"

"Well, you for instance. You are my wife now, Sofia."

"Indeed and you will lose me if you don't do as I ask."

"Why, how?"

His tone was very anxious as he asked her the question and he trembled.

She only laughed.

"My Gavrilka, I told you, you would be sorry for marrying me. I am a Gipsy. I must have excitement. If you will not join in this little scheme I must do the next best thing."

"And that is—"

"To run away with the swordmaster again."

He uttered a cry of rage.

"I would kill you."

"No. You would cry and forgive me."

"Don't be too sure of that," he said and his eyes flashed angrily.

She laughed and flung her arms round his neck again.

"My Gavrilka, I was only joking."

"And you do not love this grizzled old sword bully?"

"I hate him, Gavrilka. He is not handsome like you. I want to stamp on his dead body and spit at him."

She hissed out the last words as if she meant them all and more.

"But it must be dead or nothing," she went on. "I tell you we Gipsies are fickle and if I were to see him beat you all again as he did in Siberia, I might adore him again."

Gavril Nesseldorf ground his teeth.

"It is enough. I'll kill him."

She laughed merrily.

"That's my brave Gavrilka. We shall be there by to-morrow night."

They were silent for a little time when he asked her:

"How do you know he will be in Kazan?"

"The Brothers keep me informed. He had to wait at Tobolsk till his friend recovered. And what is more we have found where he hid the jewels."

"Where?"

"In the heel of his boot. He had a false heel made on purpose. He carries them there now."

"That is a good place."

"Yes, till it is found out."

"How are we going to catch him?"

"It is all arranged."

"But can't you tell me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You are not high enough in the order to be trusted with important secrets like this."

"But I am your husband, Sofia. We are one now. You'll tell me."

"No, Gavrilka, not a word."

"Yes, you will."

"No, I won't."

"Well, whisper it."

She laughed.

"Well, I'll tell you this much. He is to be set on in the night at Kazan as he leaves it, and if possible during his stay in the town."

"And am I to do anything toward it?"

"Not unless you want to."

"I do heartily. I long to do something to kill this scoundrel."

"Very well," she said, coolly. "You can take the lot to kill him if you wish. But a failure will be your own death-warrant."

"I'll take the risk," he said, savagely; "only let me once get one stab at him in the dark, and I can die happy afterward."

She patted his shoulder.

"There is the true Gipsy spirit. My poor Gavrilka, what a pity you were not born on the steppe like me. You might have been a true Romany chief instead of a milky-skinned baby with blue eyes."

Deeply mortified, he drew away from her, but she cast her arms round him, crying out:

"But I love you all the same, Gavrilka, my own darling, and as soon as you've killed this swordmaster I'll love you more than ever."

"I'll do it," he said, firmly, and then he fell into a deep fit of thought, from which he did not rouse up till they entered the little town of Nazar, which was about forty miles from Kazan.

They proceeded to their palace, and all the townpeople were agog to see their new princess, of whose beauty they had heard so much, while her origin was said to be from some noble house in Spain.

Dressed like a fashionable lady, Sofia had no trace of her old vagabond ways, and, like most Gipsies, she was a natural actress.

The simple townfolk were charmed with her gracious ways, and swore that so beautiful a princess had never been seen before, in which they were right, for in modern times princesses are apt to be very plain, not to say ugly people.

They were all intensely disappointed, therefore, when the prince and princess only con-

sented to stay one day at the palace, and on the next morning took fresh horses for the town of Kazan.

But disappointment and remonstrance were alike useless to change the whim of the new Princess Nesseldorf.

To Kazan she was going, and to Kazan she went, arriving there before dark.

On the same afternoon, in another telega, coming from Ekaterineburg, Olaf Svenson and his friend, Tekli Aga, drove into Kazan, and both vehicles stopped at the same hotel, where the respective owners at once recognized each other.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GIPSY PRINCESS.

OLAF had not expected to see Prince Gavril in Europe at all. Brother Paul had promised to keep him at his estate in Siberia, and they had seen enough of the Nihilist brotherhood to know that its members generally obey orders with a rigid obedience rare among the subjects of the Czar.

The Dane did not count on the strength of the young man's infatuation for the beautiful Gipsy, nor on her burning desire to be revenged on Olaf for his disdain of her charms.

They had braved the whole power of the Russian empire once before, for a woman's whim; and they were equally ready to brave the vengeance of their order to be even with the swordmaster.

Gavril, in his infatuation, had hastened to marry the Gipsy as soon as she came back to him. He had a sort of idea that it would keep her faithful to him.

She, on her part, was quite willing to have a legal claim, which could not be shaken off, on the vast estates of Nesseldorf.

His offer had been a surprise to her; but she had accepted it promptly.

And, once a princess, she had determined to be revenged on the swordmaster, or to make him come back to her.

He was the first man she had ever met, proof against her charms; and she bore him a strange mingling of hate and love, ominous of evil to Gavril, had he only suspected its depth.

She had told him the truth about the dissatisfaction of the chief of the order with what he thought the fantastic scruples of Brother Paul.

As a matter of fact, the Nihilists, though they were poor and idealists, had a keen notion of the value of money to further revolutionary ends and the possession of two such famous jewels would be a lever of great power to the order.

For the Orloff diamond was the most perfect in the world, better shaped than the Kohinoor, without flaws, and well worth a million of rubles.

And there are not more than a score of black pearls in the world, of which the largest is owned by the Russian crown.

The robbery had been kept out of the public press, but its news had been printed in fifty other ways.

The Nihilist chief knew that Olaf had sent a telegram to St. Petersburg to state that he had the jewels safe, and that it was quite probable a heavy escort would be sent to meet him whenever he should desire it.

But Sofia and Gavril knew his reckless and daring character and that he disdained to ask for an escort.

On this they counted to regain the jewels in Kazan, and Sofia's scheme was nothing less than to use the brotherhood to regain the jewels, and then to cheat them and carry them off herself.

The two telegas drew up at the door of the Moscow Hotel at the same time, and Olaf saw the prince with a fashionable lady, who at once advanced to meet him with the sweetest of smiles, saying:

"Why, prince, it is our old friend, Colonel Svenson, returned. We are delighted to see you, colonel. Why, how long it is since we met. You must come with us to-morrow to Nazar to the prince's seat there; must he not, Gavrilka? We will take no denial."

The prince took his cue from his more astute wife and was exceedingly cordial.

He had not been drinking for a month, and had greatly improved in personal appearance, besides which he had the indefinable air of high birth, which makes even a debauchee agreeable at times.

Olaf felt confused.

He knew Sofia's face, but her dress and manner were so changed that he was dazzled for a moment, as he said:

"I hope the gracious prince will not bear in mind any past troubles."

"My dear colonel, the past is buried," the prince said graciously. "It was a boy's freak, for which you paid me dear; but all is forgotten since the Princess Nesseldorf has forgiven you."

"But she will not forgive you," interrupted the princess, "unless you promise to visit us at Nazar to-morrow."

"The gracious lady must excuse us," the swordmaster stammered; "but duty has too long been neglected on account of my comrade's wounds."

"And that dear Tekli Aga, is he badly hurt?" asked Sofia sympathetically.

The Circassian bowed stiffly.

"I am old and tough. I live as you see, no thanks to your people."

The Moslem could not be polite to a woman who had led a mob against him.

Olaf pinched his arm and whispered:

"For shame, man, it is a lady."

The princess sighed:

"Ah, that duty! You are bound to St. Petersburg with your charge. And the end to us will of course be—Siberia."

"By no means," said Olaf eagerly. "I have full powers to settle everything my own way, so long as I take back the—the—"

"The charge—I understand."

"Yes, my charge. You see it would be—"

"Bad for the reputation of a certain great crown, if it were known that two of its most famous jewels had been replaced for two months by mock stones," said the Gipsy princess sarcastically. "I see. Well, colonel, so you will not come to see us at Nazar?"

"Impossible, gracious lady. I must go away from here at dawn."

"What must be, must. At least we can see the sights of Nazar together."

"I trust so, madame."

"Yes; did you ever hear of the famous Tsigani concerts at the tea-garden?"

"No, madame."

"They are worth hearing. Gavrilka shall take you there to-night—that is to say, if you are not afraid to trust yourself alone with him now."

Olaf laughed a little scornfully.

"I never was that in our worst times; and now it is all settled. I will go."

"I am sorry I cannot go with you," she said sweetly, "but it is a man's resort, and they say the songs are not always fit for a lady to hear."

She said this with an air of severe virtue, as if she had never been a Gipsy stroller herself, singing the wildest and most licentious of all songs.

The Dane bowed and looked a little disappointed. In truth the altered and more brilliant appearance of Sofia was beginning to have its effect on him. It is one thing to roam about with a despised Gipsy, however beautiful; another to have a real princess making eyes at you. Olaf felt the difference, and Sofia noticed it with a malicious joy she concealed under an appearance of great cordiality.

They went into the hotel and the prince was very hospitable, insisting on the whole party dining with him.

Olaf consented and then Tekli Aga pulled his sleeve softly and got him to come away to their room, on the plea of feeling tired from his scarcely healed wounds.

And although the princess did her best to keep them in her suite of apartments—for she had taken up quite a considerable part of the hotel—the old Circassian carried his point and took Olaf away.

When they were in their own room he locked the door and addressed Olaf gruffly:

"My brother is turning a fool in his old age. He wants to be poisoned again and lose the jewels, I suppose."

Olaf laughed carelessly.

"You are over-cautious, my friend. You forget we are not in Siberia, nor on the estates of the prince. No one can harm us, while we are in Kazan."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"But I know better. You are what they call a Christian. You believe that women have souls and are honorable like men. Do you not?"

"Well, I suppose they are much the same."

"But I know better."

"What do you know?"

"I know that our great prophet, Mohammed, who knew more about women than any man since Solimann ben Daoud, told all the true believers to beware of trusting to any woman, save their own mothers or a faithful wife of ten years."

"Well, and why not?"

"Because, says the prophet, no woman is born with a soul. She only receives one as a reward for being faithful to her husband and bearing him men children."

Olaf smiled at this doctrine, and Tekli Aga seemed to be nettled at his unbelief.

"Very well," he said, snappishly, "trust this Gipsy stroller if you will, but at least put the jewels in my charge and let me go on to the Czar to-night."

Olaf became serious at once.

"My brother is angry with me. Why?"

"Because you have consented to dine with this child of the devil and to go out at night with this boy who is her slave."

"And you really suppose—"

"I suppose nothing. I know."

"What do you know?"

"That she is plotting to get back the jewels." Olaf laid his hand on Tekli's arm.

"Listen, my brother. Have I ever lied to you?"

"Never," admitted the Circassian, gravely.

"Then let me tell you, we are quite safe in the honor of a secret society with which I have

made a solemn compact. Had it not been for that, you would now be lying under the soil of Siberia. Your life was the price of Prince Gavril's safety. I promised not to expose him and the order agreed to restore you and let the jewels go. This prince and princess are members of the order and dare not disobey its mandates. I tell you we are as safe from any more trouble from them as if we were home."

Tekli Aga looked doubtful.

"Then why do they follow us?"

"A mere accident."

"Why do they ask us to eat?"

"To show they have forgiven us."

"Then they lie. They have not."

"Well, at all events they cannot harm us."

"Why not?"

"Because we are in a public hotel in Europe, surrounded by police and troops."

"For all that be careful."

"I will, Tekli."

"And give me the jewels to keep before we go away in the morning."

Olaf looked surprised.

"Why?"

"Because your head is turned."

"What do you mean? My head turned?"

"Yes, brother. I saw you look at that daughter of the devil and when she gave you a glance of her evil eyes you were like a man in a dream. You could see nothing."

Olaf laughed constrainedly.

"Upon my word, Tekli, you are observing."

"My beard is white, brother, and I care not for fair women. They are to me like stones. I keep my sight clear. Give me the jewels to keep till to-morrow and you will find I am right in what I say."

Olaf hesitated for awhile, but finally said in a half-apologetic way:

"I am ashamed to do this, but as you wish it, I will obey you. I cannot refuse the invitations. I have received; but I will put the jewels in your charge for the present."

Tekli Aga went to the door, unlocked it and threw it wide open to see if any one had been listening; but they were safe from eavesdroppers.

He came back, and Olaf took off his right boot from which he extracted in a hidden recess in the heel the two tiny objects of so much contention and heart burning.

Tekli Aga took up the renowned diamond about as large as a hickory nut with its thousand facets throwing flashes of light into every corner of the room and said in a thoughtful tone:

"There is but one God who could make a stone like that, and but one king worthy to wear it."

Then he put diamond and pearl alike into a little wad of cotton wool and took off a screw at the end of the hilt of the short scimitar he always wore.

"They will never look there," he said as he put the jewels into their resting-place and screwed on the top again, "and if they do, they must take the edge before they get the handle."

Then he said to Olaf:

"My brother can dine with these Pagans. I shall eat my own bread and watch."

The swordmaster for possibly the first time in his life, seemed to be uneasy as he answered:

"I must keep my word, Tekli. In the mean time, I don't believe they can poison me or dare attempt it. As for the boy, if he tries on any of his tricks, I think I can take care of myself from a dozen such as he."

Tekli Aga shook his head.

"You will see. You are running your head into danger for nothing and you will be sorry for it before you sleep."

Olaf could not quite shake off the influence of his companion's words as he left the room.

It seemed to him absurd that he should feel any fear of a weak boy like Gavril Nesseldorf, in the midst of a populous town like Kazan, where all the people were loyal to the Czar, where there was a strong garrison and a large body of police; yet he could not help a little uneasiness.

He took the precaution of looking at his pistols before he went down-stairs. They had been lying in the telega unused and almost forgotten on his journey from the city of Tobolsk, so safe and uneventful had been the whole trip.

When he took them up off his baggage he noticed that they were a good deal rusted, and that the cylinders of the revolvers did not turn as readily as they ought.

With the instinct of a soldier he took them apart to clean them, and oiled the pin on which the chambers revolved, together with the lock.

Then it occurred to him that having been loaded so long, some barrel might miss fire and so thinking he determined to fire off what he had and reload the weapons.

He took them out to a balcony of the hotel which looked into an empty court, and, without thinking, pointed the pistol upward and tried to fire off the charges.

"Click, click, click!"

It was all he could get out of twelve different loads, and he said to himself:

"By Jove, lucky I looked for these."

He took them back to his room just as the

shades of twilight were advancing, and took off the caps. The old-fashioned Colt's pistol, the only one then in use, loaded with loose powder from a flask and used caps.

He went to his baggage for caps and found the little tin box.

He shook it.

Not a sound was heard. He had not a single percussion cap left.

Then he experienced a slight tremor and sat down to think over it all.

"I had a box full when I left Tobolsk," he said to himself. "I remember I tried to buy another and they had none. These Russians are behind the age with their old flint-lock pistols for cavalry and when they have caps, they are too large for our purpose."

He went to his loading flask and shook it.

That, too, was empty.

Now thoroughly convinced that some plot was on foot and that Tekli Aga was right, he took his pistols to pieces again and tried to blow through the barrels.

Both were stopped up and by feeling with the cleaning-rod he ascertained that a bullet had been driven half-way down the barrel of each.

"So if one of those charges had gone off, I should have burst the pistol," he said to himself. "I wish Tekli would come back."

For Tekli Aga had gone out of the room; it was growing dark, and he felt as if he had lost his way.

The fact was that his pistols were no more use than so many clubs.

While he was thinking what to do there came a tap at the door.

"Dinner is served," observed Matias Petrovitch the prince's servant, "and their nobilities wait for you."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TSIGANI.

FOR a moment Olaf Svenson was inclined to tell Matias Petrovitch to go to the devil and tell the prince he was a scoundrel.

Then he thought to himself:

"No, it is not his fault. Whoever doctored my pistols was with Tekli Aga and myself on the journey."

Aloud he said:

"I will be down in a minute."

He began to think.

"No one has touched my baggage on the road but Tekli and myself, unless when we were both asleep. These Nihilists must have agents on the road. Probably they have repented of Brother Paul's bargain. But no one can hurt me in Kazan. All I have to do is to go to the commandant and ask for an escort. An escort to save me from what? A boy I can kill with a blow of my fist. No, no, that would be too ridiculous. I will see to my pistols in the morning before I start. It may be a plot to have me waylaid on the road, but there can be no danger here."

He went down to dinner.

He found the new-made princess resplendent in a gorgeous evening toilette, while Prince Gavril was walking impatiently up and down the room.

"Ah, you are late, swordmaster. The soup will be cold; but that will be your loss."

"I beg your highness's pardon, but I was just looking at my pistols, and I find that some one has been tampering with them on the journey."

Olaf said this, watching the prince to see if he would change color.

Gavril seemed annoyed.

"That is too bad. An agreement is an agreement; and we are responsible for the honor of the order. You shall have my own if you wish. You can try them, swordmaster."

The princess too seemed concerned.

"After dinner we will see to it. I fear this is the plot of some robbers to waylay you on your journey to-morrow, colonel."

"In the mean time let us get to the soup," exclaimed Gavril peevishly. "On my word I am as hungry as a wolf."

They sat down to dinner, and Olaf watched them carefully, eating only of such dishes as they took, and expecting every moment some fresh plot.

It was, however, soon clear that, whatever else this singular pair might be capable of doing, they had no intention of poisoning their guest that night.

They seemed to be scrupulous to show this by eating of everything first, and the dinner went through peacefully.

After dinner, in true Russian fashion, came cigarettes, which each person made for himself out of loose tobacco. There were no more diabolical machines in cigars.

Dinner over, the princess observed:

"Now, Gavrilka, if you are to go to that Tsigani concert, it is time. For my part, I must bid you good-night."

Olaf opened the door for her and came back to his host, to whom he said:

"In confidence, my prince, I thought that you were into that confounded affair of the pistols; but I begin to see I was wrong."

"If you have any suspicions, let us go to the commandant at once," cried the prince eagerly. "I assure you I have no intention of doing

you any injury. In truth I am too happy to be let off as I am. But you see, we young men are fond of excitement at any time, and when we are in love it is so much worse. I was led into that scrape from vanity and love, to beat my neighbor Strogonoff, and be the talk of the empire; but now it is different."

"How different?"

"I am married, and wish to raise up a family in honor and respect."

"I hope you may. And now about the Tsigani and their concert. Who are they, and what sort of a concert do they give?"

"The Tsigani, as you are probably aware, are Gipsies."

"Yes, I know that."

"And all Gipsies sing and dance, some well, some better, some divinely. The princess, for instance, would set you crazy, if she would condescend to do it."

"But that is all over with her now."

"Of course. Princess Nesseldorf must sit still and look at others amuse her."

"But these other Tsigani."

They are one of the sights of Kazan."

"In what respect?"

"You know Kazan is full of Tartars and it has a theater and university and numbers of students. The town is always full. Very well, it is a great place for amusements and the Tsigani are the best of all."

"What do they do?"

"They sing together and improvise their music as they go along. You have been to operas?"

"Of course."

"So have I and heard all the best singers; but such voices as these Tsigani have, I never heard any where. The men often have tenor voices which rise as high as a woman's and the women sing like birds."

"They must be worth hearing."

"They are and their voices are not all."

"What then?"

"They play divinely on the *balalaika*—you know that is our Russian guitar—and their tunes have a peculiar beauty that I never heard anywhere else."

"Do they have many such airs?"

"They never sing the same tune twice nor use the same words. They seem to think in music and poetry, just as we do in words, and the wonderful thing is that if the leader starts a new tune all the rest seem to think with him and fall into harmony at once in the concert."

"They must be well worth hearing, indeed," observed Olaf who was much interested in what the prince was saying.

Gavril rose.

"Let us go see them, then."

"How far is it?"

The swordmaster's suspicions began to return to him, though he showed no signs.

"Oh not far: just on the outskirts of the town."

"And you say the place is full of Tartars. Is it safe at night to go unarmed?"

"Bah, the police are everywhere. I carry no weapons except a stick."

"Very well, let me have it. I think I can use a stick better than you if there be trouble."

Gavril laughed good-humoredly.

"You should be able."

He handed Olaf a stout stick and they left the hotel just as the last rays of twilight faded away while the full moon rode high in heaven.

"A beautiful night, prince."

"Just fit for the gardens."

They started along, passing numbers of soldiers off duty, lounging about, police officers, students, black-capped Tartars, Americans, Jews and a medley of the various races that go to make up Russian life in the south-east provinces.

They passed the theater brightly lighted and the prince said:

"If you like we will go in there. The play is in French to-night."

"No, I hate French," said Olaf.

This was one of his pet prejudices, born of jealousy in the fencing line.

They passed on, the crowds as thick as ever. The streets were full of flaring torches, fed with naphtha, from Astrachan.

"Foreigners like Kazan," said the prince in his lazy way, "they say it is so unlike anything else in Europe."

"It is more like Asia," admitted Olaf.

At last they came to a low brick wall on the other side of which they could see green trees full of colored lanterns and hear the clink of glasses and the buzz of voices.

"That is the tea garden," said the prince.

They came to a gate where they paid an old woman some coppers for admittance and found themselves in a garden that exactly resembled a German beer garden on a large scale, with hundreds of girls in white aprons hurrying to and fro with trays.

But the glasses they carried were always empty and not a drop of beer could be seen anywhere.

Besides the trays some carried little brass urns which emitted clouds of white steam.

These they set on the green tables before the guests and lighted lamps under them.

These were the *samorars*, the Russian tea urn. For a trifling gratuity the garden furnishes the hot water, and the guests bring their own tea and sugar or buy them separate.

A pinch of tea in a glass, some boiling water dropped on it, then alternately a sip of hot tea and a bite at a lump of sugar, that is Russian tea-drinking.

Olaf watched the scene for a moment, but it was no novelty to him, and he asked:

"Can't we get anything but tea here?"

"Certainly, if we wish; we have only to take a seat and tell a girl."

"But I don't see your Tsigani."

"They must be here. Let us take a good seat where we can hear well."

They found a table close to a raised stage inside a railing.

Only a few people were near them.

"This is the gentlemen's part," said the prince.

They sat down, and a pretty Russian girl with a velvet cap and brown eyes came to them.

"Let us have a bottle of champagne," said the swordmaster, yawning. "I am sick of your tea."

She hurried away and presently brought them a bottle of sparkling cider, for which they were obliged to pay the equivalent of five dollars.

"That is for being in the gentlemen's place," said Olaf, in a sour tone; but the prince only laughed. He could not understand how any man could hesitate to spend money. He had a vague idea that all gentlemen had plenty of money.

Presently, as they sat there, the Tsigani came on the platform.

There were nearly twenty of them; the men a little over medium height, a few tall, but all slender and lithe with broad shoulders and slim waists.

The women were of the same slender make, with remarkably small hands and feet.

They were all evidently of one race, and very pure in blood at that, for their faces were strikingly alike, oval in shape, with delicate features, olive complexion, black, sparkling eyes, and vivid white teeth and scarlet lips.

A handsomer lot of people it would have been hard to find, and their rich and peculiar dress aided their general dash of appearance. Scarlet and lemon yellow set off on black velvet, with considerable tinsel, were the prevailing colors, which admirably suited their dark, flashing style of beauty.

The men all carried long knives in their sashes, and most were provided with long basket-hilted cudgels, stuck in the sash behind them.

"Do they fight?" asked Olaf.

"Oh, yes, they have grand stick fights and dances, as you will see."

But besides their weapons each had some sort of musical instrument.

The men carried *balalaikas*, and one had a zither, which he placed on a little table in front of him, while all the women had tambourines.

Olaf noticed that while the men were serious and rather sullen in their demeanor, the girls, every one of whom was pretty, were quite the reverse, smiling at the audience and flirting unrestrainedly.

Then the chief of the Gipsies, a tall, powerful fellow with long black hair clubbed in a net, jetty beard and fierce-looking face, struck a chord on the zither.

In a moment the women ceased to flirt and bent their eyes on the chief.

In the same moment all the men turned toward him, seized their instruments and began to finger very lightly the same chord as he had struck.

Then arose a gentle whispering prelude as the ends of their fingers rustled lightly over the strings, hovering up and down the scales two or three tones on each side of the key-note, as if not decided where to go, the leader listening intently.

"Clang! Clang!"

He struck the zither again with more force, the same chord and another at a very difficult interval, wild and mournful in its effect.

They were silent for a moment, but repeated it after him in the same sort of whisper, when he suddenly dashed into a wild prelude without any warning on the zither and began after a few bars to sing.

His voice was a deep rich barytone of power and more sweetness than Olaf had ever heard before from a man.

What he sung was unknown to the crowd of Russians but to the swordmaster who had lived with Gipsies and picked up much of their language at various times it was as plain as English.

The Gipsy had not sung two lines when the others joined in with a singularly sweet refrain which they repeated at intervals, while the girls beat time on their tambourines and lent the aid of their sweet voices alternating with the men.

The air was one of those wild, mournful strains, difficult to reduce to notation on account of its abruptly changing intervals but generally in the minor keys. It held the audience en-

tranced with its sweetness, though they could not tell a word of what was said.

And this is what the Gipses sung as near as it can be given in English:

CHIEF.
The lark of the steppe soars high,
CHORUS OF MEN.
Soars high, in the sky.
CHIEF.
He looks at the sun and he sings,
CHORUS OF GIRLS.
Sings, sings, beating time with his wings.
CHIEF.
And he sings of his love to the sun,
MEN.
To the sun, that sees all that is done.
WOMEN.
On the broad green steppe so free.
GRAND CHORUS.
Oh, the free, free free, grassy sea!
"Then away," cries the lark, "to the desert with me!
For an hour of freedom up in the sky
Is worth on the earth an eternity."

They evidently improvised the lines as an idea struck each one, and the others were quick as lightning to grasp it and to intensify it, while their eyes flashed and they seemed to be carried away out of themselves by the images suggested by the music, and fairly shouted the last lines in praise of a free wandering life.

Then the chief struck his zither again with a clang and produced immediate silence, as he went on with a second verse in the same way:

CHIEF.
Down in the steppe his mate she cowers,
MEN.
Low she cowers, 'mid the flowers.
CHIEF.
And she watches her lord on high,
GIRLS.
Singing high, far up in the sky.
CHIEF.
And she calls to her love, "Come down,
GIRLS (eagerly).
"Come down, sweet love, come down!
The waves of grief come o'er my head,
For love of thee 'twill strike me dead,
Come down, come down, come down.
GRAND CHORUS.
"Come hither, sweet love, come hither,
We care not whence or whither,
For in all the earth is nothing worth,
But the love that rules us all.
Let the clouds go roam in the empty sky,
Let the tempests rave so thou art nigh,
The Czar and the noble are slaves that fall,
And love is alone the lord of all."

Olaf noticed that on this second verse the girls in their enthusiasm took the refrain out of the mouth of the men as if the image of love were too alluring to be resisted.

And they acted the whole scene with such fire and passion that even the Russian audience which understood not a word was moved by the tableau and applauded with tremendous enthusiasm as the girls in their pantomime seemed to be trying to allure the roving bird back to earth with wreathing arms and ardent looks of love.

Then they sunk back into their seats and the chief began again in a slower and mournful key the third verse:

CHIEF.
Far away in the deep blue sky,
MEN.
In the deep blue sky, the lonely sky,
CHIEF.
The steppe hawk soars with his keen dark eye,
GIRLS.
With his hungry, cruel, keen dark eye,
CHIEF.
And his talons are spread like a soldier's sword,
MEN.
Like the sword, the sword, the flaming sword,
The king of the battle, the nation's lord,
Hurrah for the sword of the grassy sea,
The blade of the man who dares be free!
CHIEF.
And the hawk he swoops like the arrow's flight,
MEN.
The arrow that flits like a flash of light,
The shaft that is always first to smite,
The weapon of men who dare to fight,
The wanderer's friend and dear delight,
CHIEF.
And he swoops on the lark as he soars.
GIRLS (mournfully).
As he soars, and the blood down pours,
And the last red drop it falls, falls, falls,
On the face of the love he left behind
And never will see again.
GRAND CHORUS.
Love is better than soaring; life is better than death;
Nothing can give the red blood back; nothing restore lost breath.
List to the maidens, lovers, shun ye the open sky,
Love while you may and kiss all day,
For the grave is all too nigh.

The descriptive part of this music was sung with intense enthusiasm by the men, who seemed to glory in the ideas of fighting it contained, which the girls on the contrary, repelled.

The moral contained in the chorus seemed to be adopted as a concession to the female part of

the band and Olaf could not help laughing grimly over it.

The prince asked him the cause.

"It was about what those Gipsies were singing," said Olaf frankly, and Gavril seemed much surprised.

"What, do you understand their tongue?"

"I understand a little of a great many tongues, my prince. It is a useful accomplishment."

"And what did they say?"

Olaf gave him a little sketch and told him of the easy going moral at the end.

Gavril nodded his head thoughtfully.

"I believe they are right; love is worth all the rest of the world put together, and a dead man can never be made alive again."

Olaf looked at him with some contempt.

"Yes, and if all the men thought your way they'd be at the mercy of any foe who had courage enough to come and steal their girls away from them. We're not all larks nor are there any eagles and hawks among us. Any man can learn to take care of himself if he wishes."

The prince looked at the platform.

"Hush, they are going to sing again," he said.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DOUBLE DUEL.

BUT the Tsigani were not going to sing again. They seemed to have had enough of music for the present, for there was a great difference between men and women.

The men had a fierce, scornful look about them, while the women were as decidedly soft and seducing.

The girls now took the musical instruments of the men and sat down on the ground in a circle, while the men, headed by the chief, went through a species of sword dance, with their basket-hilted sticks, cutting rapidly at each other and parrying in time to the music of the girls' *balal-aikas*, while they sung a sort of song like this:

SWORD DANCE SONG.

Strike hard, brothers, the girls look on,
The brave man laughs at the blows,
The coward he sits by himself alone,
And the girls, they laugh at his nose.

After the battle repose is sweet,
After the battle the kisses are quick,
After the dance of glancing feet,
After the dance of the striking stick.

Hurrah for the brave, he gets most love,
Hurrah for the man who can fight,
The coward he sits alone by the stove,
But the brave they win delight.

The men seemed to be excited to frenzy by this song and clashed their sticks with blows which Olaf could see were delivered with all their force. Presently one of the Gipsies broke his stick and retired, while the others kept on harder than ever, beginning to shout in chorus with the girls, and finally got into a regular pitched battle with each other in which they gave and received blows which drew blood, with perfect unconcern till the chief suddenly shouted: "Stop!"

Then the men went and sat down panting for breath and the women fanned them with their tambourines.

When this stage of the entertainment was reached the audience applauded vehemently, and the prince observed:

"They fence well, those Gipsies. I have heard say they can beat most white men."

Olaf curled his lip slightly.

"Why, man, that was only a dance, not free fighting. They are good stout fellows, but they know nothing."

The prince eyed him furtively.

"Do you think you could beat them?"

Olaf positively laughed.

"What a question! Of course. Why, it would be child's play."

Gavril made no more remarks, but called for another bottle of the vile champagne and began to look round.

Olaf had been so much interested in the ways and doings of the Gipsies that he had almost forgotten all about possible plots against himself, and did not notice any one in particular in the crowd.

Prince Gavril, on the other hand, was looking keenly round him, and presently he made the peculiar sign of the Nihilist order to some one at the next table. It was answered by no less than eight people simultaneously, and he knew then that he and his companion were watched by the brotherhood.

He made the reply sign and then excused himself for a moment, while Olaf was still absorbed in watching the Gipsies.

He strolled behind a tree where he was joined immediately by a little mean-looking boy, in whom no one would have recognized the beautiful princess Sofia.

"Tell the Gipsies that he says he can beat any of them like children," he whispered hurriedly.

"Let them be ready to help me do the work."

"All right."

She nodded and glided away and he went back to the table where Olaf still sat as if fascinated, staring at the Gipsies.

They had been resting awhile, and presently

the girls began a song and dance which was so suggestively pantomimic that it needed no knowledge of the language to understand its meaning.

While it was going on, some of the men strolled down and mingled with the audience, and after awhile several came near the table where Olaf and the prince were sitting.

The swordmaster, who was always a jolly fellow in a crowd, called for wine and invited the Gipsy Chief to join them, talking to him in his own language at which the other seemed to be greatly surprised.

He called to the others who came up and they entered into an animated conversation with the Dane, turning out to be full of quaint sayings like all Gipsies and very dignified.

At last the chief suddenly addressed Olaf:

"Is it true, brother, that you think you could handle one of us like a child?"

His tone was rather menacing, and Olaf said good-naturedly:

"Never mind, chief. I don't want to fight with you, for you are good fellows."

The Gipsy shook his head.

"That will not do; one has told us that you say you can handle any one of us like a child."

"Who told you that?"

"One of our tribe."

"I never said so to one of your tribe."

"But you said so, brother."

"I did."

Olaf started up as he answered and stepped back a little distance, for he was not a man to be taken unawares.

The Gipsy Chief eyed him steadily and then said to his men, who were standing near by quiet and watchful:

"It is true. The man has said it."

The hostile glances shot at Olaf convinced him that he was in for a fight, but he had his stick with him and he answered:

"It is true, I said it."

The Gipsy rose up.

"Then you are ready to prove it. Which of us can you handle like a child?"

Olaf scanned the tall lithe forms round him for a moment. The chief was the heaviest man there.

"Yourself for example."

The chief nodded gravely.

"You are not a coward. I will try you with the stick, then with the knife if you dare."

"I have no knife," said Olaf simply.

"We will lend you one."

"Very well, I am ready."

Without another word, the chief led the way to the stage and a buzz of comment went up from the garden.

It was whispered all over that there was to be a stick fight between the Gipsy Chief who was renowned for his skill and a foreign officer who had insulted him.

The tea-garden was full of Russian students and there were no police in sight. Why or how they had vanished no one except those in the secret knew, but Gavril could have explained had he wished for it was the members of his order in the garden that had coaxed them away on one pretext or another and not till the signal had been given to Sofia hidden among the trees did she signal to the chief to pick his quarrel.

Olaf was not disinclined to show his skill before the crowd. He had not yet outlived the vanity of display and he felt sure of his victory over the Gipsy Chief.

They took their places on the stage, each armed with a basket-hilted cudgel and Olaf said:

"First blood decides it, I suppose?"

The Gipsy nodded.

"First blood be it."

With that word he sprang like a tiger at the swordmaster, discharging a shower of blows and evidently trusting to beat down his guard by main force.

But Olaf had not been a swordmaster for nearly forty years for nothing and the fierce assault of the Gipsy made no impression. Instead, he made his own stick play in so rapidly, that in a dozen passes he had hit the other five or six times and finally sent him staggering back stunned and dizzy from a sharp blow on the temple, the blood streaming down his cheek in a little stream.

The Gipsy Chief was furious but he owned his defeat with a good grace.

"You are a man of your hands, brother," he said grimly, "but the knife will show."

Now though a stick duel was only grazing the edge of the law, the idea of one with the knife was very different, and some of the spectators began to call out:

"Take care! the police will come!"

But the Gipsy's blood was up and he said grimly to Olaf:

"If you are not afraid I'm not. Take this knife; I'll borrow another."

Without a moment's hesitation, Olaf took the proffered weapon, and one of the other Gipsies handed his to his chief, while the men stood gravely round, watching the duel.

But Olaf had seen too much of the knife in the countries of Spanish America to fear its use in the hands of a Russian Gipsy. He sprang back and stood in a sort of boxing attitude, his

left hand open and quivering ready to clutch at his antagonist's wrist, and the Gipsy assumed a similar attitude and came at him viciously.

But this contest was much shorter than the other.

The Gipsy made a fierce lunge and the next moment dropped his knife with a deep curse of pain.

Instead of parrying the swordmaster had cut him on the wrist and disabled him in a moment.

It was his secret knife trick.

Then he turned to the other Gipsies and said in their own tongue:

"I seek no quarrel, brothers. Have I fought fairly or not?"

It was the chief himself who answered with an air of enforced admiration:

"You were right. We are as children in your hands. You are a great fighter."

The buzz faded away in the garden and the prince who had been watching eagerly with his disguised wife, said with an air of disappointment:

"He has beaten again. The man is a devil."

Her eyes were gleaming with a strange expression as she said:

"See to it I do not go to him again."

"What do you mean?" he muttered, turning as pale as ashes.

"That it is your turn now."

"But what can I do? I am unarmed."

"Take this."

She passed into his breast inside his vest one of the long Gipsy knives.

"It is dark. The people are going home. I will see that you are helped. But you must strike the first blow or I leave you to-morrow."

Without more words she turned and left him to himself, trembling all over. The sweat stood out on his forehead as he reflected on the alternative. He was madly infatuated with Sofia and desperately afraid of the swordmaster.

Presently the people began to leave the garden and the Gipsy chief who had bound up his hand took his men from the stage, while Olaf strolled away to find the prince.

When he saw Gavril he said:

"You are a pretty fellow."

"Why? what have I done?"

"Oh, nothing of consequence, only tried to get me killed quietly."

"What do you mean? If you are surely joking, swordmaster."

"It might have been no joke, my prince. But I forgive you."

"But what do you mean?"

"You know well enough. You told the Gipsies what I said and I had to spoil that fine fellow's zither-playing for a month to come if not more."

"But I said nothing to them. I did not leave you for a moment."

"Then how came they to pick a quarrel with me for my words?"

"Indeed, I do not know. Some one must have overheard you."

"Perhaps, I have my notions. But it is all one. You cannot harm me. You are, after all, as Brother Paul says, only a fool or I would have you punished as I could if I wished. Did you ever see a man run the green street as they call it in Siberia? Well, I could make you do that if I were minded, but I despise you too much. Do you understand? I do not fear you at any time, not if I am unarmed and you have a revolver; for you are a poor contemptible coward. And now it's time to go home. Come along."

The champagne or cider, whichever it was, had had a slight effect on Olaf, and it made him what he never was when quite sober, angry and overbearing.

The prince listened to him trembling all over, but dared make no reply save to say with a deprecating laugh:

"You are pleased to be witty to-night."

Then Olaf ran his own left arm through the other's right and said:

"Come along. Which way is it to the hotel?"

By this time the garden was nearly empty of people, and Gavril said with a sudden inspiration of treachery:

"The shortest way is by the back gate; but it is pretty dark and you seem to be afraid to be alone with me."

The swordmaster shouted with laughter.

"Afraid of you! Why I could kill you with one blow of my fist."

The prince affected to be amazed.

"Impossible! With a knife or stick, but with the fist and one blow—"

"And I tell you I have killed a man in Mexico with one blow of my fist, my little prince, and he never spoke after I hit him. So come along, and take care you behave on the way. The old man is not dead yet."

He hurried Gavril along in the direction he had indicated, and the prince began to realize that his companion was decidedly excited with wine or drugs, he could not tell which.

Then it flashed into his mind that Olaf had drunk two bottles with the Gipsies, and the mystery was explained.

Sofia must have sent him drugged wine.

Now or never then was his chance to get even

with the swordmaster, and as he thought of it he hurried along the dark street so fast that Olaf grumbled.

"You needn't run. We've all night to get home in, and I don't like running."

The prince was watching the dark walls at the side of the street to see if any one were near.

Sofia's words told him he would be helped if he only struck the first blow.

He knew the street on which they were. It led out to the open country through the Tartar quarter of the town, and was the best spot in the world for a murder.

Open cesspools after the pleasant little suburban fashion of Russia were to be smelt at intervals, and any one of these would hold a body conveniently.

The only difficulty was that he was mortally afraid of his man.

The moment Olaf discovered he was being deceived, he felt convinced that the Dane would turn on him with the stout ash stick he carried, and probably beat him half to death.

And in the mean time the swordmaster kept a tight grip on his right arm while he ran grumbling and scolding on in a way he never used when he was sober.

"Yes, my little prince, we are nearly through with each other now. To-morrow I shall go to St. Petersburg, and if ever I catch you there on the Newsky I think I shall have to give you a beating. It would serve you right were I to do it now, but to tell the truth I want to get to the hotel first. But one thing, you have a very pretty wife, and by Jove I think I must forgive you on her account. I say, my little man, do you know that Sofia is dead in love with me as it is? Ah, I am an old rat, and I know the meaning of a woman's eyes. I have had scores of them mad after me in my day, and I am not too old yet for them to admire me. But that is not to the purpose, for now she has become an honest woman I do not intend to take advantage of her. But where the devil are we going to? Where is that confounded hotel? I say, my little man, have you not mistaken the way? You pretended to know this town."

"Oh, come on," said the prince, roughly, as the other pulled back. "I know where we are going well enough."

Olaf released his arm and stopped in a disputatious mood, for the drugs were working their way on him.

"You don't know any such thing. Do you mean to tell me I lie?"

"No, no," pleaded the prince, trembling all over, for he saw the time had come. He was close to Olaf's left side and his right arm was free.

He put his hand in his breast and felt the haft of the knife and he touched Olaf with the other hand as he stood by him.

"Please come along quietly."

"I tell you, you're a fool," began Olaf, "and your wife knows more in a minute—"

"Curses of hell on you!" hissed the prince, and with the word he whipped out the knife and stabbed with all his might at Olaf's heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOILED AGAIN.

THE Dane was drugged and stupid; but he had not lost the instinct of a lifetime. He saw the flash of the blade and threw up his left arm to ward it.

The blade went through the arm above the elbow and scratched the skin over his heart, staggering him so that he shouted:

"Murder! Murder! Help!"

For the first time in his life Olaf called for help as Gavril, frenzied with excitement, plucked out the knife and stabbed at him again and again.

But the shock had sobered the Dane, and the trained athlete leaped back, flourishing his stout stick, and shouting.

As the prince came at him again Olaf sent the knife flying from his hand with a blow, and Gavril uttered a shrill scream of rage and terror, and stood holding his wrist. It was broken.

In another moment the angry Dane would have beaten him to death, when heavy steps came down the dark street, and four more men, with knives, came rushing at him.

But now it was a fight, and he was in his element.

Running back a few steps he kept his cudgel playing with all the force and skill he could muster, alternately at the wrists and temples of his assailants, all the while retreating and shouting.

It seemed to him an hour that the unequal contest lasted; actually, it was not five full minutes, when the clatter of sabers could be heard and voices shouting:

"This way! This way!"

He shouted himself, louder than before, and cut harder than ever, while his assailants were plainly hesitating.

Then came the gallop of horses, and he found himself alone in the dark street, Gavril and the others having vanished, while down on him came a party of cavalry soldiers.

"Help!" he cried. "I am here, comrades."

"It is he!" shouted a voice he knew, the voice

of Tekli Aga; and the Circassian leaped down off his horse and rushed up to his friend, whom he found in a pretty bad plight, with three stab wounds in his left arm, one of which had gone through and through. Most men would have fainted from loss of blood; but Olaf was one of those tough, hardened veterans that nothing seems to kill; and as soon as they had bound up his wound tightly he was able to get on a horse and ride to the hotel, where he heard from Tekli Aga how it came about that he had come to his assistance in such timely guise.

Tekli, it appeared, had been so suspicious of the prince and princess, and had been so convinced of the infatuation and rashness of his friend, Olaf, that he had gone straight to the Governor of Kazan, told him the whole story with the exception of the Nihilist part of it, and had obtained a party of Cossacks, with which he had started to hunt up the swordmaster.

He had arrived at the garden as the crowd was coming out; had heard of Olaf's trouble with the Gipsies, and that the prince and the Dane had been seen going out to the fields, the swordmaster seeming to be very drunk.

Full of fears, he had ridden out that way, and had gone slowly till he heard the cries for help, when he had galloped up just in time to save his friend's life.

"And the next question," said Olaf, "is to find out where is that rascally prince."

"Why?" asked Tekli, suspiciously.

"Simply to arrest him and take him to the Czar."

"Ah, then, you have changed your mind."

"How so?"

"He is no longer a poor fool, not worth the trouble of punishing?"

"He is a dangerous vermin, who does not deserve mercy. He has broken faith with Brother Paul and me, and he must be punished."

Tekli Aga gave a grim smile.

"And Sofia?"

"She is a devil. I am convinced she was into that plot."

"Why?"

"Because the men who attacked me were Gipsies."

"What then?"

"And they would not have tried to kill a man who speaks their tongue unless one of their own people had set them on."

"You are right. She is the worst."

"How do you know, Tekli?"

"She went out to the garden disguised as a boy. One of the secret police saw her."

"Indeed; are you sure?"

"Quite; and what is more she has fled with the prince."

"Of course they are not such fools as to stay here."

"They have gone to Nazan. But they cannot escape, Olaf."

"No; their race is nearly run."

"I will go after them to-morrow, Olaf."

"Not without me."

"But you are not able to travel."

"I have traveled before in as bad plight, an old soldier can stand a good deal."

And so it turned out.

The next day, accompanied by a strong party of Cossacks, the two friends set off for Nazan, driving at furious speed, and reaching there three hours before sunset.

They found the prince's palace wide open and the prince himself roaring drunk.

With true Russian stolidity, knowing the uselessness of attempting to escape, now everything was discovered, he had set himself to wait for arrest, and had comforted himself in the mean time in true Russian fashion by getting drunk.

The Cossacks surrounded the house, and Olaf with his arm in a sling, got out of the telega along with Tekli Aga, and went into the palace.

The servants stood in groups round the hall looking frightened.

Had the escort not been there it is probable they might have resisted, but the presence of the Cossacks quelled them completely.

The swordmaster spoke to the officer of the Cossacks.

"Bring along a sergeant and ten men. I have done with unnecessary risks."

"It is time," observed Tekli dryly.

Olaf made no comment; for he felt considerably mortified by his narrow escape of the night before.

They entered the palace, and the Dane beckoned to one of the servants.

"Where is Prince Gavril?"

The Russian stammered and lied, as his most natural resource.

"I do not know, most high-born one."

"Is he in the palace?"

"No, most high-born one."

"You said just now you did not know."

"Yes, most high-born one."

"Has he gone hunting?"

"Yes, most high-born one."

"Is he at church?"

"Yes, most high-born one."

"Is he in bed?"

"Yes, most high-born one."

"Look here, my friend, do you know what you are saying?"

"No, most high-born one."
 "Then you are a fool?"
 "Yes, most high-born one."
 Here the lieutenant of the Cossacks put in:
 "You stupid pig, tell where your lord is, or we will beat you to death."

The Russian with the same stolidity replied:
 "If it please your nobility."
 They were almost in despair over his unpentetrability when they heard a loud voice in the interior of the palace singing a Russian drinking song and Olaf cried out eagerly:
 "That's his voice; come this way."

They ran up-stairs and followed the voice into a large room evidently used as a smoking and lounging place for men.

It was hung all round with foils, boxing gloves, guns, pistols, trophies of arms, long Turkish pipes, German meerschaums and all such paraphernalia of a rich and fast young man.

In the midst of the room, dressed in the most elaborate of velvet dressing gowns, his wounded wrists tied up in splints, was Prince Gavril Nesseldorf; his handsome face fiery red from drinking; his light curls tumbled and disarranged.

On a low table of malachite, worth several thousand dollars, were a tray of delicate glasses and a dozen bottles of champagne of which five had already been emptied, and the Princess Sofia in a dashing *neglige* dress, with as many jewels on as if she were going to a ball, was jolling in an American rocking-chair with her pretty French slippers on the table, smoking a cigarette and smiling as if she had never known a care.

The entrance of the swordmaster and escort seemed to produce no trace of alarm on either.

The prince looked round and went on to the end of his verse and cried out:

"Welcome to Nazar, swordmaster. We were waiting for you. See the bottles. You must finish them all, you and your friends. Where are those lazy dogs? Peter, Matias, Martin, Gregory, come here!"

And two or three servants came running in and began, without waiting for orders to open and pour out champagne.

"There's no poison in it," shouted Gavril, with a drunken hiccup. "I'll take a glass to show you. Hurra!"

And he tossed off three or four in succession as if to make good his assertion.

The friends had hitherto been so much astonished at what they saw that they had made no observation, but now Olaf said:

"Prince Gavril Fedoritch Nesseldorf, I arrest you in the name of the Czar for high treason, robbery, and attempt at murder."

The prince looked at him with a leer of drunken sarcasm.

"Is that all?" he asked, coolly. "Put in parricide, forgery, and a few more. I may as well go to Siberia for the whole as for a part."

"You will find those enough," the Cossack officer interrupted, roughly.

"Lieutenant Stepanoff I believe," retorted the prince, ironically. "Son of the notary Boris Stepanoff whom my father used to kick round the palace for exercise. You are an impudent scoundrel, Stepanoff, and if my hand were well I would cane you."

Lieutenant Stepanoff turned scarlet and roared out angrily:

"You are no better than I. We know all your fine doings and you shall smart for it."

But here Olaf interposed.

"Lieutenant, you will be silent. This gentleman is my prisoner and any one who insults him will be accountable to me."

"You hear that, scum of a notary's son," cried the prince gleefully. "This is a brave gentleman and I honor him, but you are a poor devil who ought to be kicked. Come, swordmaster, I have been waiting for you and I am only sorry for one thing."

"And what is that?"

"That you didn't kill me last night. But you shall see that, henceforth, Gavril Fedoritch knows how to suffer like a brave gentleman. Your health."

He drank off another bumper.

Olaf turned gravely to Sofia.

"And it is my duty to arrest you, too," he said quietly.

The Gipsy princess laughed carelessly.

"I am content. We have had a gay life we two, and now we shall have all the world talking about us."

She seemed to be childishly pleased at the idea of the notoriety that was to attach to her, and to have no fears.

Then the prince rose unsteadily and asked:

"Are we to walk, or can we be driven to St. Petersburg, swordmaster?"

"You will be driven to Moscow and from there we take the train to the capital."

"That is good. Can we have attendance?"

"If you will give your parole not to make any trouble on the road."

"The honor of Nesseldorf is at stake, I only wish to go to my punishment like a gentleman."

"You shall be permitted to do so."

And he was.

The next day a train of telegraphs and carts

laden with baggage set out from Nazar and the progress of Prince Gavril to St. Petersburg was more like a triumphal march than the progress of a prisoner to his place of judgment.

On the fourth day they arrived at Moscow.

NOTE.—Lest it should be deemed an extravagant invention to suppose that a single man, even a swordmaster, should be able after three severe knife wounds to beat off the attack of four men, with nothing but a stick, as narrated in the foregoing chapter, the author desires to say that the incident of the fight in the dark is an almost exact transcript of his own experience.

The attack took place at Philadelphia, in the year 1851, near Germantown, Pa., and the assailants were Spaniards. After the attack, which was frustrated by the accidental passing of a country wagon, which scared away the would-be assassins, the author was able to walk more than two miles alone to the nearest toll house where he obtained assistance and rode to Philadelphia. The salvation of his life resulted from the fact that the brachial artery lies inside the arm and that the knife was diverted from it by the protecting bone. Had the brachial artery been pierced it is probable he would have died from loss of blood.

The scars of the wounds still remain as evidence of the attack.

T. H. M.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

BARON GRODNOWITZ, chief of police to his Imperial Majesty the Czar of all the Russias, was seated in his cabinet, looking peculiarly good tempered and pleased. He rubbed his hands frequently and looked at the clock which pointed to the hour of his daily audience.

When it had fully arrived he took his portfolio under his arm and proceeded to the emperor's cabinet, where he asked:

"Has his majesty inquired for me yet?"

"No, baron."

"Then please to announce that I am ready to present my report."

"Yes, baron."

Presently the chamberlain came out.

"His majesty will see you now, baron."

Baron Grodnowitz went in and found the Czar seated by a table, looking vexed, with Prince Zalinski and Count Boris, both standing before him, as if they had been receiving a severe lecture.

The emperor inclined his head slightly as the baron entered.

"Baron Grodnowitz, my chief of police, I believe."

"Yes, your majesty."

"I ask because I am not certain," said the emperor in an ironical tone.

"It is I, your majesty."

"And you command my police, baron?"

"Yes, majesty."

"Then how is it that a month has passed since two of the finest jewels were stolen from my crown, right under the nose of my guards and you have yet found no tidings of the thieves?"

"It is not my fault, sire."

"Not your fault? Of course not. You are all ready enough at excuses. My father was better served. Whose fault is it?"

Grodnowitz hesitated.

"It is not for me to say, sire."

"Speak out, I order you."

"I have had no charge of the affair, sire. Your majesty was pleased to trust it to a certain stranger whom Prince Zalinski vouched for—"

"I never vouched for him," interrupted the prince warmly.

The emperor frowned. He was by nature a mild, easy man, and allowed his ministers great freedom; but the life of an irresponsible autocrat was fast hardening him, as it ultimately did into a suspicious tyrant.

"Be silent, both of you. Baron, have you heard anything of the jewels?"

"Yes, sire."

The Czar glanced up in some surprise.

"What is it?"

"They are found, sire."

"Who has them?"

"They were in Tobolsk two weeks ago."

"Where are they now?"

"On the road here, sire."

"Who has them?"

"The person your majesty sent for them."

"And the thief?"

"The person your majesty sent has deemed it his duty to pardon the thief, sire."

The Czar started angrily.

"What do you mean? Who dares—"

"I mean, sire, that your emissary made a compact with the agents of a secret revolutionary brotherhood, by which they gave him up the jewels on condition that he would allow the thief to escape."

"Can you prove this?"

"I have my witness within call, sire."

"Send for him at once."

Baron Grodnowitz bowed and left the room, while the Czar, evidently much irritated, said to Zalinski:

"So this is the man of whom you told such wonderful stories, this bold swordsman who was to bring back thief and plunder in a trice?"

The prince could make no reply but to stammer:

"I could not help it, sire. He did all those things as a young man."

"Then age has dulled his wits, prince. I am disgusted with you all."

Presently Grodnowitz came back.

"The witness waits, sire."

"Send him in at once."

The emperor's voice was harsh and sharp and he looked angry.

Into the room shambled Louka with his branded face, but otherwise a half-respectable *moujik* in looks, save for the short crop of bristles on his head.

The Czar stared.

"A convict! Is he your best witness?"

"No, sire, but he can tell the truth. He was sent to me by Major Kursoff, the lieutenant-governor of the prison at Tobolsk. They have just found out a terrible Nihilist plot, and this man has turned government evidence."

The emperor looked disgusted, but turned to Louka and asked:

"Who are you?"

"Louka Louvitch, father."

"Are you yet a convict?"

"No, father. I came out of my time two years ago."

"How do you live now?"

"I am servant to Paul Borishkin, father."

"Paul Borishkin?"

"The editor of the Moscow Firebrand, sire, suppressed by your illustrious father. The man received three thousand strokes, and was sentenced to perpetual exile."

It was Grodnowitz who gave the required explanation in a low tone.

"And this Borishkin? What is all this? Why are you here? Who sent you?"

"There was a look of weary disgust on the emperor's face. He was repelled by Louka's appearance and abject manner, and wanted to get through at once.

"I will tell you all at once, father," said the ex-convict, humbly. "I am not a bad man, and I want to see my poor old mother once more. Major Kursoff told me that if I told the whole truth I might be pardoned and sent home to close my mother's eyes. It is this way. A man came to see Paul Paulitch Borishkin one day and we dropped him into a well. He wanted to arrest some one, and Brother Paul pretended he was Major Kursoff. And this man and Brother Paul went out to see a man run down the green street, and—"

"Silence!" interrupted the Czar, in a tone of great impatience. "Baron Grodnowitz, tell this fool's story for him, if you know it."

Poor Louka, much mortified, stood fumbling at his cap, as Grodnowitz explained:

"It seems that your majesty's emissary fell into the hands of this Paul Borishkin, who goes by the name of Brother Paul, and who is the head of the Nihilists in Siberia, and that they worked so on the fears of your majesty's emissary as to induce him to leave the country, without giving information to the proper authorities."

"And how did this man come to turn informer to Major Kursoff?"

"Through the hope of pardon, sire."

"Who is the thief, then?"

Before Baron Grodnowitz could answer, came a hurried knock at the door and the clank of weapons in the anteroom.

The Czar started:

"Who dares disturb us? Come in, there!"

The chamberlain opened the door, and the martial figure of the swordmaster stood there, saluting.

Behind him were Tekli Aga and several other people.

Baron Grodnowitz smiled maliciously.

"Here is the object of your majesty's anxiety."

The Czar had risen in his surprise at the unprecedented intrusion.

"What do you want? How dare you?" he asked haughtily.

The swordmaster, without a symptom of fear stalked in still saluting, with his left arm in a sling.

Then he held out to the Czar a folded paper.

"Your majesty's order to all people to respect me. I have no further use for it and return it to your majesty."

The Czar took it silently and Olaf held out a second paper.

"The account of my expenses for your majesty's treasurer."

The Czar nodded and Count Boris took the paper quietly.

Then the swordmaster beckoned to Tekli Aga.

"Your sword, brother."

The Circassian drew it and handed it to him.

Olaf unscrewed the end of the hilt, took out a little bundle of cotton wool and laid on the table two shining objects.

"The Orloff diamond, sire. The Black Pearl of Kazan."

With an appearance of more interest than he had hitherto shown the Czar took the jewels,

examined them closely and gave them to Count Boris, saying:

"Keep them safer, hereafter."

Then Olaf turned to the door and handed back Tekli Aga's sword.

"Come in, prince," he said quietly.

The next moment Prince Gavril and Sofia, the one in his full uniform as a colonel of irregular Tartar cavalry, the other in full court dress, came in.

"My prisoners, sire. Prince Gavril Fedoritch Nesseldorf and his wife Princess Sofia Ivanowna Nesseldorf. The prince took the jewels from the crown under the assumed name of Gavril Somoff and the princess aided him by engaging the sentry in conversation."

The Czar looked at the illustrious culprits for a moment in extreme astonishment.

"What made you do this?" he asked at last.

Gavril saluted as a soldier.

"Because I was a fool, sire, and in love."

The emperor turned his gaze on the marvelous beauty of Sofia and a faint smile crossed his face.

"Was it for love of this lady that you ran your neck into danger?" he asked.

"Yes, sire."

There was more dignity in Gavril's tone and manner than any one had ever seen there before.

"And you?" asked Alexander, turning to Sofia. "What induced you to commit a crime certain to be punished?"

She looked into his face with a certain seductive glance she had often practiced on others.

"To get this opportunity of seeing the greatest prince on earth face to face."

Had this come from a plain woman it would have disgusted the Czar, but spoken in a liquid voice, accompanied by the soft languor of dark eyes, and a gleam of white teeth through partly red lips, even the majesty of Russia could not resist a smile and a feeling of relenting.

Then he turned away to Baron Grodnowitz. "Take your man away. I care to hear no more. My emissary has done his duty and I am satisfied."

Deeply mortified, Grodnowitz sneaked off and the Czar never heard the full details of the terrible plot which the chief of police was about to unravel when he was so summarily choked off by the appearance of Olaf.

Then the emperor turned again to Gavril, and addressed him gravely:

"Young man, if I forgive you, it will be a precedent for others. You will go to General Moshkin, the Minister of War, and report to him for duty in the Caucasus with the Frontier Cossacks. You will leave your wife at home and will not see her on any pretext for ten years."

Gavril turned deadly pale, but saluted with trembling lips.

"Yes, father and master."

"Go then, at once."

"May I—take farewell?" faltered the prince in a low voice.

"No. Go."

The Czar was stern and peremptory.

Without another word Gavril Fedoritch Nesseldorf saluted and went out, while Sofia, with a peculiar smile of triumph on her lips waited.

She fancied she had fascinated the Czar, and was destined to play the part of a favorite.

The emperor scanned her critically as she stood there.

"Your face is strange to me," he said. "Are you a daughter of a noble house?"

Sofia flushed slightly and looked more beautiful than ever.

"My race dates back to the flood," she said, "and my people know no master."

"A Gipsy, sire," put in Olaf cruelly, as the Czar turned to him inquiringly:

Instantly the emperor's face changed.

Had Sofia been one of his own class, there is little doubt she would have escaped all punishment, but as it was he turned away with a feeling of contempt, for a Gipsy is regarded as the lowest of vagabonds in Russia.

He sounded a bell.

"Tell Pope Alex Louvitch to come here."

Pope Alex was the private chaplain, and soon made his appearance, a venerable prelate with long white beard.

"Take this girl to the convent of the Sisters of the Penitential Gray Nuns at Moscow, and tell them to keep her in penance till she repents of her sins," said the Czar, in a stern voice, and Sofia uttered a cry of extreme terror.

She had heard of the rigorous rule of the Gray Nuns before.

But Pope Alex, who was a sour old man, swept her off, weeping and pleading, and that was the last Olaf ever saw of frail, fickle Sofia, the Gipsy.

The swordmaster was left alone with the Czar, Count Boris and Tekli Aga, and the emperor found time at last to speak to him, which he did in a cordial and respectful tone.

"Swordmaster, you have done your work well at least."

"Your majesty is very good. But for my friend, Tekli Aga, of your Circassian guard, I might not have succeeded so well, if indeed I had got out alive."

"Tekli Aga shall be pensioned and sent home if he desires."

The brightening of the Circassian's face showed that he did desire it.

"You are hurt, swordmaster."

"A trifle, your majesty."

"Enough to make you deserve a good reward. Besides, you have done your duty, recovered my property, aided me to render justice, and therefore deserve reward."

Olaf bowed silently.

"Do you wish to enter my service?"

The swordmaster hesitated.

"You can occupy the post I understand my father offered you, Swordmaster-General to all my armies. I will create the office anew for you, with the rank of general of brigade, residence in the palace and a salary that you shall fix yourself. Is that sufficient?"

"More than sufficient, sire, but—"

Olaf was changing color, and his hands appeared to be trembling.

"Perhaps you do not care to enter a service which will tie you down to one place. Is that it?"

The emperor's tone was very kind.

Olaf looked up.

"Frankly, sire, I doubt if I could be happy, used as I am to my liberty and to a life of roaming. Besides—"

"Besides, what?"

"Besides, sire, I am not used to the manners of courts; my education, thanks to my own willfulness, is poor; and, in short, there is no life for me but that of a fencer."

"You were born too late, colonel. You should have lived a century and a half ago in the days of my ancestor Peter the Great," said Alexander, smiling. "Well, you shall name your own reward. You have a family?"

"Yes, sire."

"Could they be happy in Russia? I would place your children in good positions."

"Thank your majesty, but—"

"But what is the matter then?"

Olaf drew a deep breath.

"May I speak frankly to your majesty, as one who desires the welfare of Russia and your majesty?"

The emperor looked surprised.

"You may."

"Will your majesty really allow me to name my own reward?"

"I have said so twice."

The emperor's tone was cold.

"And you will grant it, sire?"

The Czar smiled slightly.

"Of course, of course. I see you are no courtier, Colonel Svenson."

Olaf hardly noticed anything. He seemed to be much agitated as he began:

"Sire, I have a petition, a great one to ask. Grant me a pardon for a noble man, guilty of no crime, but beaten and scarred like a common malefactor, and condemned to perpetual exile in the wilds of Siberia. Sire, but for that man, I should not be here to-day, and he has shown me the deep-seated fires of a volcano on which your empire rests to-day which must burst forth at last if you do not remove quickly to safer foundations."

Alexander had looked amazed, his two ministers terrified, while the Dane was speaking, and when he stopped the Czar said coldly:

"Colonel Svenson, I do not desire to discuss politics with you or any one. My kingdom is safe in the love of my people. But as I promised your choice of a reward let us hear the name of this person you desire to be pardoned."

"Paul Paulitch Borishkin."

The emperor started slightly at the name but went to the table, wrote a few lines on a paper, and gave it to Olaf. It ran:

"The Minister of Public Justice will at once release Paul Paulitch Borishkin now suspect at Tobolsk and give him thirty days to leave Russia."

"ALEXANDER."

"Will that do?" asked the Czar.

Olaf bowed.

"That is all I ask, sire, except leave to depart myself from Cronstadt."

The emperor went to the table again and wrote a few words.

"Count Boris, you will see Colonel Svenson's passage paid wherever he wishes to go, and will give him this for his services in regaining the jewels."

Count Boris stared at the order as if amazed, but bowed.

"Farewell, colonel."

The emperor held out his hand which the Dane respectfully kissed.

Then he and Tekli Aga backed out of the presence and were quickly followed into the ante-chamber by Count Boris.

"By Jove, swordmaster," said the treasurer, familiarly. "You are in luck after all. Do you know what this order says?"

"No."

"It says: 'Pay Colonel Olaf Svenson the sum of fifty thousand rubles.'"

"ALEXANDER."

Olaf shook his head sadly.

"I had rather he had listened to me, count. The day will come, perhaps a score of years from now, when the volcano will burst, and then he will remember that he was warned."

Count Boris stared.

"My dear sir, are you crazy?"

"No, but I see what is coming. I have only one comfort."

"And what is that?"

"I have saved Brother Paul."

THE END.

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